

# **REPORT ON ACADEMIC DISRUPTION DUE TO SARS TO THE COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC POLICY AND PROGRAMS**

**OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND PROVOST**

**May 14th, 2003**

The Provost declared a disruption to the academic program under the *Grading Practices Policy* Section II(3) on March 31, 2003 as a result of the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The University community has been informed of the changes due to the disruption through e-mail communications and webpage postings. Students in specific programs have been advised of changes through their faculties.

The outbreak containment measures imposed by public health authorities had a significant impact on the operation of the health sciences programs, since students were barred from access to hospitals. In the senior years of most of the health professional programs, a significant portion of the academic program occurs in health care facilities. The disruption has also affected graduate students in Division IV (Life Sciences) of the School of Graduate Studies where their research program is based in hospital research institutes or is dependent on collection of data from patients in hospitals.

The health sciences faculties also took steps to assist the Toronto hospital community in containing the spread of disease between hospital sites, and thus restricted or cancelled campus-based activities that involved participants from multiple hospital sites. Therefore, some impact was also felt in divisions outside of the health sciences as certain sessions were cancelled.

The following sections summarize the key academic changes to University Programs.

## **Faculty of Medicine**

### *Undergraduate medical (MD) program*

Year IV: The program for this class is almost entirely hospital-based. Access to hospitals was not available after March 31. The final block of rotations was not completed by most students (only those on elective at hospitals outside the Toronto area were able to complete these rotations). Since all students have completed their core rotations and meet the requirements for licensure examinations the Faculty has determined that these students will be able to graduate. Campus based sessions were offered to assist students with preparation for these examinations. The Faculty is proposing to add a transcript notation that will note the extenuating circumstances for the final block.

Year III: This class is mostly hospital based and access was suspended from March 31 to May 12. Some campus-based activities did continue. The core placement that would have taken place during this time period will be made up next year and an elective block will be eliminated. The Faculty is proposing to add a transcript notation that will note the extenuating circumstances that resulted in the elimination of this elective.

Years I and II: These classes attend at their hospital academies for small group sessions with clinician teachers. These activities were eliminated and replaced with self-study and large group sessions on campus.

### *Postgraduate Medicine*

These trainees provide essential clinical services and were allowed to continue to work in the hospitals. There was some disruption as a change in the scheduled hospital rotation was deferred and multi-site educational sessions were cancelled.

### *Professional Masters Programs*

The programs most affected were those that require clinical placement of some or all of their students in the GTA hospitals. These include, the MSc in Occupational Therapy, MSc in Physical Therapy, MHSc (Speech and Language Pathology) and the MSc in Genetic Counselling degree programs. Although a temporary delay in program (mostly year 2) was experienced, all the placements were finally accommodated either in the community (outside of hospitals) or in the chronic-care hospitals, e.g., Bloorview MacMillan Children's Center - that opened to students 2 weeks before the acute care affiliated hospitals became available for re-entry. In some instances, e.g., Genetic Counselling, where the program is only located at hospitals affected by SARS, the final module composed of clinical (actual patient) case studies had to be changed to simulated case studies. All the programs will be completed on time for graduation and licensing exams. Any urgent curriculum changes were checked with the professional accreditation organizations to ensure that these temporary revisions to the programs were acceptable. As of May 5 all students who needed to enter the affiliated hospitals were in place.

### *Medical Radiation Sciences BSc (joint program with The Michener Institute)*

The 3rd year students who were in full time clinical placements in the GTA hospitals were not able to complete their training in these sites. Fortunately, the majority of students had already completed most of their clinical training and arrangements were made for completion at The Michener Institute using simulated patients. These students will complete their degree program on time. Furthermore, the 2nd year class experienced delay in entering the hospital sites for clinical training, but re-arrangement of their modular courses has enabled them to stay on schedule. One concern is a small cohort of individuals who were in remediation in year 3 and will continue to be delayed (although they may have experienced delay independent of SARS since they are required to spend extra time in clinical training to achieve an acceptable level of competency).

## **Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy**

### *Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) Program*

The PharmD is a two year program. The first year was affected when clinical staff from the hospitals were not allowed to come to the University to give educational sessions. Arrangements were made for most of these educational activities to be conducted through conference calls and using the internet. The second year students were all assigned to clinical rotations at hospital sites in Toronto when the SARS restrictions were implemented. The preceptors at the various sites assigned projects, case studies and drug information questions to the students and discussed these over the phone. The students were to start a new 4 week rotation on Monday April 28th. Students were placed in non-institutionalized settings so that they could continue with the program and its academic integrity.

### *Undergraduate Pharmacy Program*

Fourth Year Pharmacy Students (B.Sc.PhM): Each student had participated in 4 weeks of the required 8-week Structured Practical Experience Program (SPEP) rotation in an institutional/hospital practice site when rotations were suspended. Instructions were disseminated to students on how remaining required activities were to be completed. Direct patient-care activities were replaced by having students work up a specified number of patient cases assigned by their pharmacist Teaching Associates. Discussion of cases (by telephone) with Teaching Associates was required for evaluation of the cases. Students suspended from rotations were also required to complete a SARS assignment, specifically looking at the medications that were being used.

First Year Pharmacy (B.Sc.PhM.) Students: The 4th oral assessment in Phm 127 (Professional Communication Skills in Pharmacy Practice) was not held since the tutors were mostly from the hospitals. The students were assessed based on the best 2 out of the previous 3 oral assessments.

Third Year Pharmacy (B.Sc.PhM.) Students: The final examination in Phm 321 (Therapeutics - Pharmaceutical Care II) format had to be changed from an oral format to a written examination since the majority of examiners are hospital personnel.

### **Faculty of Nursing**

Some lecturers in the undergraduate program were unable to attend sessions because of SARS control measures. In most instances substitutions were made in a timely manner. Clinical experience for students has been disrupted. Students have generally missed about six weeks of placement time. A number of alternative activities for lost clinical time have been put in place including lab practice within the Faculty, web based learning activities and some community based activities. The faculty is considering the possibility of arranging extra clinical experience (perhaps during vacation time) for students if there is concern regarding their level of clinical competence as a result of lost time.

### **Faculty of Social Work**

First year students were completing a practicum when hospital access was limited. The Faculty has reduced the number of days required for this practicum. Nearly all students in the most severely affected sites were relocated (at their request) to finish their practicums within non-health related settings (e.g., Children's Aid and School Boards). Since the days are not required to be contiguous some students are deferring to the fall or making other arrangements.

### **Faculty of Dentistry**

There was no major academic disruption to the dentistry program. SARS control measures were implemented in the clinic run within the Faculty.

### **School of Graduate Studies**

A large proportion of life sciences graduate students are located in the hospitals and hospital-based research institutes. Many students did experience some delay in their experimental work - although for the majority this was a 2 to 3 week period. The students who were affected for a longer period of time were those who utilize hospital-based patients as subjects for clinical research. Some of these students, in particular, may experience up to a 3 month delay in their research progress (since both in- and

out-patient numbers have not yet returned to full capacity). SGS and the graduate units are working to document the number of students and the specific timing of their delay. SGS is ensuring that these students will not be charged extra tuition fees and will remain eligible for OSAP/UTAPS.

Some graduate courses with clinical faculty members had sessions postponed. We are aware of one course that will be completed in the fall – no students in that course were to graduate this spring.

**Conclusion**

All academic program changes have been made to ensure that students are able to continue with their studies while maintaining program integrity. As much as feasible students have been consulted on program changes, although some decisions regarding clinical placements had to be made on an emergent basis. No students will incur extra academic charges as a result of changes. Some students may need to spend extra time in Toronto to complete required academic work. Faculties will ensure that legitimate financial needs are addressed.

The Provost wishes to convey thanks to the faculty and administrative staff in these programs who spent countless hours re-arranging clinical placement schedules for health professional students. Their heroic effort has enabled all students to complete their programs on time without academic or professional training compromise. I also wish to thank the students who have been understanding of the significant changes that had to be made to their academic programs during this very unusual period.

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