

November 30, 2020

Dear Residents and Fellows,

It has been some time since I have sent a message to all of you. It has been a turbulent few weeks with the marked increase in COVID19 cases in our region- this past week alone has seen quite a significant rise in Hamilton with outbreaks noted in many of our long-term care facilities. We have also had outbreaks in our hospitals both in Hamilton and Waterloo Regional Campus. We have collectively learned so much over the past few months, but we recognize there continues to be considerable challenges to our delivery of healthcare and your roles as postgraduate trainees during this pandemic.

It is hard to believe that it has been almost 9 months since we all became aware of the seriousness of this pandemic. I think back now to where we were in March of this year and it seems to me a lifetime away. I remember when risk for exposure to COVID was defined by travel to Wuhan and later all international travel and now our greatest risk is within our homes, workplace, and our communities. I remember the uncertainty about the appropriate PPE, availability of PPE and the evolution of the benefits of universal masking.

I also acknowledge how these past 9 months have affected you as learners with disruptions to training, fear and uncertainty about your personal health and those close to you, loss of electives and the truly awful (think that is the best word) turmoil over exams, which still continues with the MCCQE2. And that is just your professional work- I cannot know all the sacrifices you have made in your personal lives but have heard many stories along the way- elderly parents; young children at home; families several thousands of miles away, and the effects of isolation and loss that we all share.

Despite this second wave, we do have room for optimism as we all look forward to 2021 being the year, we all get vaccinated and slowly get back to our lives. However, so many lessons learned in the past few months that we cannot forget – the lives lost to COVID-19 and the impact on families, social disparities even more stark in a pandemic, our long-term facilities and the importance of advocacy of appropriate resources and importantly, the remarkable collegiality, professionalism, humanity and resilience of our health care workers- faculty, our residents and fellows and our allied care health professionals. I have also been amazed at the efforts of your program directors and program assistants to do everything they can to support residency education in a constantly changing environment.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all our residents and staff at PARO. Your PARO representatives locally and provincially have provided such support to our PG offices and residents; and tirelessly advocated for all residents with every stakeholder. Your local

representatives have participated in our PGME COVID-19 taskforce meetings, which continues to meet every 2 weeks and ensure concerns are brought to the committee members.

And finally, thanks to all of you for the invaluable service you provide to patients and for supporting each other and your junior colleagues.

If there is a concern that I have not addressed below in this letter. please let me know.

Communication:

Effective and timely communication continues to be so important. However, the sheer volume of emails, newsletters etc. is overwhelming for most of us. As a reminder, we have tried to collate all of information pertaining to COVID-19 from the university community, hospitals, etc., on the [PGME Website](#). We encourage you to please check this website often and read the information updates carefully. We want to ensure that you remain informed with the most relevant and up to date information related to policies, guidelines, protocols, and general communications.

Please remember that we are here to support you and answer any questions you have. Please contact me at wasip@mcmaster.ca and/or the [PGME office](#) with any questions and concerns. We continue to have the anonymous question function found on PGME COVID-19 Website., which I will answer within 24 hours.

The PGME COVID-19 task force continues to meet on a biweekly basis and includes resident representation from PARO. We encourage you to send any of [your questions or concerns to your PARO reps](#) to bring forward your issues, challenges, and concerns to the PGME COVID-19 taskforce. You are also welcome to email me directly at wasip@mcmaster.ca.

Redeployment

At this time, we have not yet activated the redeployment of any learners to support service at any hospital sites. However, as the hospitals have gradually ramped up regular activities, it may not take many COVID-19 admitted patients to reach the threshold for redeployment. The key difference for this second wave is that the hospitals are already at high occupancy rates despite having relatively low numbers of COVID-19 patients. The other issue facing clinical services and residency programs is the holiday block where we will be functioning at 50% resident numbers for each period of the holiday block. As in the spring, there is a faculty redeployment schedule for Internal Medicine at both sites which will be activated first before redeployment of residents from other programs.

Below is a PowerPoint slide estimating the numbers in each of stages and hospital capacity at HHS. Similar ratio of numbers has been predicted for SJH. Redeployment of off-service learners will be required for Stage 2; as well, redeployment may happen in Stage 1 if there are learners who need to be removed from the current schedule due to isolation/ illness. As mentioned previously, faculty will also be redeployed at similar numbers.

Step 3: Continued

► The chart below shows the **surplus** of COVID beds found compared to the COVID expected demand for stages 1-3.

Population	Stage I			Stage II			Stage III		
	Expected Demand	Actual (COVID Beds)	Surplus/ (Gap)	Expected Demand	Actual (COVID Beds)	Surplus/ (Gap)	Expected Demand	Actual (COVID Beds)	Surplus/ (Gap)
ADULT									
Ward	82	83	1	244	251	7	480	487	7
Critical Care	26	41	15	78	92	14	156	156	0
PEDIATRICS									
Ward	10	26	16	44	60	16	84	90	6
Critical Care	1	12	11	4	12	8	9	12	3

As we continue to work with the hospitals and your programs regarding redeployment, we will update the April redeployment guidelines accordingly when we have further information. For now, please review the [Redeployment Principles](#), which will remain the same. I will update all of you in the next few days as I get more information about need redeployment, scheduling, and processes.

Please note residents based at Waterloo and Niagara Regional Campuses will be redeployed at these sites and have already received information from Drs. Mountjoy and Bell regarding the process. Family medicine residents based at other distributed learning sites may have redeployment activities within that community. We will continue to share information as it becomes available.

Housing and Accommodations

Learners who have been exposed or tested positive for COVID-19

Accommodations are available for Learners who have been exposed or tested positive for COVID-19 and are required to self-isolate for 14 days. Learners can find out more information on the [PGME Housing and Accommodations website](#).

Learners who feel that they cannot return home because they live with vulnerable family members

PGME has negotiated a reduced rate at Staybridge Suites Hamilton for Learners who have NOT been exposed nor have tested positive for COVID-19. Learners can access a room for \$99 per night with a reduced rate code. Details for this opportunity, and additional housing options available for Learners across our regions can be found on the [Hotel Accommodations for Learners](#) website.

CMA Foundation Bursary

In the Spring, the CMA Foundation introduced a bursary for residents who demonstrate extraneous or unanticipated expenses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The bursary is designed to provide immediate relief for unexpected financial needs such as the inability to meet essential living expenses due specifically to COVID-19. It is not intended to be a source of long-term funding or replace lost income or support discretionary expenses. Funding remains available until the end of the academic year (June 2021) for learners facing unanticipated costs related to COVID-19. For information about the [CMA-F Bursary and the Terms of Reference](#), [visit the website](#).

Information, Reminders, Recommendations for Postgraduate Learners

- At this time, PGME Learners are permitted to provide care of patients with suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 if the most responsible physicians agree. Please also review with your program regarding any program-specific guidelines.
- Postgraduate learners (residents and fellows) should continue to take direction from hospitals regarding processes and procedures specific to their location. You have now become familiar with the screening processes at each location. You can find the [EHS/OHS screening and reporting workflow](#) on the COVID-19 website if you are experiencing symptoms. These offices are available to offer you guidance, direction, and support.
- The hospitals have provided a [workflow process should school-aged children be ill](#) or if an outbreak occurs in their school. Please follow this workflow should you find yourself in either of these situations.
- The program must submit [a Leave of Absence form \(medical leave\)](#) on behalf of Learners who are away from training for more than seven days (ill, quarantine, etc.). If you are absent from training for less than 14 days, your training lines will not be affected. Learners who are absent for more than 14 days of training will require a return to work note from a physician. As per hospital protocol, you must also contact EHS/OHS to be cleared to return to work.
- Learners are strongly encouraged to have the flu shot. This is not a mandatory requirement but is strongly recommended.

- We are aware that there has been a couple of instances of learners missed during contact tracing during hospital outbreaks. The hospital education team are aware and continue to refine their processes to ensure that contact tracing is as complete as possible.
- Please be aware that learners must wear eye protection (goggles; face shields) when entering the emergency room at both SJH and HHS corporation.

Electives within Canada

As the second wave of COVID-19 continues to display and increase in the number of cases, all universities across Canada are reviewing elective processes and communicate any changes directly with the PGME offices if postgraduate learners are affected. For the most part, electives within Canada for postgraduate Learners have NOT been restricted (with the exception of Dalhousie University) and will proceed as scheduled. As we receive more information, the PGME office or the PGME office of the university where you were scheduled to complete an elective will notify you directly.

International Electives (including the USA)

We are permitting learners to continue with international electives as planned under the restriction that a two-week self-quarantine must be completed upon their return to Canada. If the learner cannot make alternate arrangements (virtual care, research time, etc.) with their program, this time will be allocated as vacation or unpaid leave and will not be counted towards credentialing for program completion. We discourage learners from pursuing an international elective at this time.

Personal Travel

As you know, there are quarantine efforts and re-entry restrictions for both Canadians and international travelers who wish to re/enter Canada. We strongly encourage learners to consider the potential impact on their health and training experience for any personal travel. If you choose to move forward with personal international travel plans, please note that it may result in lost educational time and the self-isolation period will not be paid for Ministry of Health funded trainees (unless you have made arrangements with your program for an educational block- virtual care, research, etc.). However, program directors and PGME recognize that many of you have not been able to see your families for several months and there is no immediate end to the current restrictions. We realize how much this effects learner wellness and certainly we will support your requests to the best of our ability.

MCCQE2 Examinations:

The Medical Council of Canada (MCC) has recently cancelled the on-site exams and are planning for a virtual examination in May. We have not received any further details and unsure of capacity to administer the exam to candidates who have not been able to complete it this year and new candidates. It is our understanding that as information becomes available the MCC will email learners directly however PGME will continue to post information on the COVID-19 information hub.

Public Health Guidelines:

Our first wave during the pandemic was marked by uncertainty, lack of knowledge and fear for ourselves, our family, and our colleagues. This time we are certainly further ahead in terms of our collective knowledge about the virus and its spread. Now in November, headed into the December holidays, along with the above, we are all also suffering from fatigue and “when is this going to be over”. It is easy for all of us to let our guards down, as we have seen happen in our communities. It is so important that we continue to be vigilant and responsible about following Public Health guidelines about size of gatherings, use of face masks and physical distancing. The public has faith in us as health care workers that we will do the right thing and make the right choices, however difficult.

Making the right choices does have consequences for our well-being and the sense of isolation is very real. These will be especially difficult over the holiday season, but I know from many of you, how creative you have become with social zoom. I know that in no way does it fully replace the personal contact but for now, this is the right choice.

As always, we are all here to support you: PGME, Program Assistants and Program Directors and Resident Affairs. We encourage you to please reach out to us.

PGME Staff Working at Home for Winter Semester

The PGME staff will continue to work from home for the winter semester; however, we have staff available for in person appointments on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. Please visit our website for a [full staff directory to schedule an appointment](#).

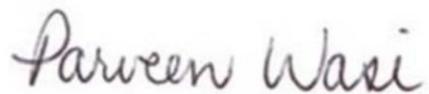
In the event of a lost or damaged ID badge, you can attain a new ID badge at the security office of MUMC - for HHS sites (1280 Main Street West) during the hours **0700 to 1500 hours, Mon-Fri**, or the St. Joe’s security office for SJHH access badge (50 Charlton Avenue East, Mary Grace G1103) during the hours of **0830 to noon and 1300 to 1500 hours, Mon-Fri**. If a new badge is issued, **you must [email the PGME office](#)** with the new badge number – this is the first five digits found on the back of the card. This information is required to arrange Scrubex access for the new badge, and MedSIS must be updated with the new number.

Important Resources

- McMaster University and the Faculty of Health Sciences are committed to following the direction of the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and the [Public Health Services of Hamilton](#).
- In the Spring, McMaster University updated the [Guidelines for the Support of Learners during Clinical Placements in the FHS During a Pandemic or Localized Outbreak](#). We recommend that you review these guidelines.
- McMaster’s official voice on the COVID-19 situation is posted on McMaster’s [Daily News website](#).

- COFM's [Public Health Emergency Preparedness Guidelines](#).
- Regular updates are posted on [MyStJoes](#), the hospital intranet and via the [HHS Citrix](#).
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Niagara Public Health](#)
- [Waterloo Public Health](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

Thank-you to all of you from the PGME community.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Parveen Wasi". The script is cursive and fluid.

Parveen Wasi, M.D., F.R.C.P.C.
Associate Dean, Postgraduate Medical Education
McMaster University