

Re: Resumption of weekly COVID-19 related updates from the Director

January 15th, 2021

Dear Students,

Welcome to 2021!

This is the first message of the year, and a continuation of the weekly updates related to your studies at the Ingram School of Nursing (ISoN) in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I take this opportunity to remind you that these updates, in tandem with weekly virtual Town Hall sessions, are part of our continuing efforts to provide clarity and transparency in decision-making by ISoN leadership, together with our rationale for the decisions made. An archive of all weekly updates can be found on our website, organized by date [here](#).

In collaboration with members of your student leadership, the new day and time for Weekly Virtual Town Halls has been confirmed as Mondays from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. EST via [Zoom](#). Please let them know how this is working for you. If you were unable to attend the first Town Hall of 2021 which took place on Monday, January 11th, you may access the recording of it [here](#) with the passcode: **aAbm!a45**.

I will cover five issues this week: (1) COVID-19 vaccinations for students; (2) student safety; (3) Summer 2021 clinical courses; (4) financial compensation for nursing students; and (5) BNI Bursary Program

I. COVID-19 VACCINATIONS FOR STUDENTS

We have received new information regarding the vaccination of students, which differs depending on where students have been assigned for their clinical rotations.

As of yesterday evening, the **Jewish General Hospital (JGH)** has formally opened their vaccination program to all students assigned to their clinical areas in Winter 2021. Students to be vaccinated first are those providing direct care in acute settings (i.e., currently excluded are students only conducting projects and those assigned to ambulatory-care areas). It is important to note that the JGH reserves the right to change the inclusion/exclusion criteria as needed without advanced notice. ISoN's Clinical Placements Office (CPO) and relevant Course Coordinators will be preparing the lists of students to be submitted to the JGH by 4:00 p.m. tomorrow. The JGH Human Resources Department will then contact students to set an appointment to be vaccinated. **Students need to be sure they can easily be reached by phone for this purpose.** As for the

Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CIUSSS-CODIM) outside of JGH, the **CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CIUSSS-ODIM)**, and the **McGill University Health Centre (MUHC)**, there is no new information regarding a vaccination plan for students assigned to their clinical areas.

Please know that the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) which includes ISON, is regularly in discussion with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and our clinical partners regarding the need for all our health-profession students to be vaccinated. ISON students should feel comfortable to advocate for themselves within their respective clinical sites as well.

II. STUDENT SAFETY

Clinical education

The increase in reported cases of COVID-19 in Quebec is a major ongoing concern and continues to affect our lives and cause anxiety. Please know that the safety of our students continues to be of the utmost importance to all ISON members. We have been communicating with our clinical partners daily regarding student safety; ensuring the availability and usage of PPE, tracking COVID-related activities on the various units, and advocating for student vaccinations. It should be noted that outbreaks are not occurring at ISON nor at McGill at-large, with the exception of a few instances, due to the ongoing preventive measures in place such as handwashing, mask-wearing, and distancing.

Given the rapid transmission of COVID-19 that Montreal is currently experiencing, some ISON students will be on clinical units with COVID-positive patients. This is especially true for students placed in critical-care areas. In all cases, students are subject to extra safety measures including **not** participating in any aerosol-generating medical procedures (AGMPs).

At-risk family members

Despite these and other ongoing efforts, the reality for many of us remains not only keeping ourselves safe but also ensuring the health and safety of the people with whom we live, in particular, immunocompromised and other at-risk individuals. Other Associate Deans in the FMHS have shared that their health-profession students are experiencing the same difficulties.

- I have queried the Dean of Students to see if **space in residences** might be reserved for students in these situations but have since learned that this will not be possible;
- Some students voiced that **scheduling clinical placements in blocks** (as had been done in the Fall) could be a solution since the transmission risk would be over fewer weeks rather than over the entire semester. We returned to our usual course pattern this Winter, which

is structured to maximize the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge into the practice of nursing throughout the academic program. This course pattern supports ISoN's ability to meet our goal of offering you an excellent education. Our clinical partners did not require us to organize clinical assignments in blocks this session. They were aware of the various steps we are taking to prevent transmission risk and with this in mind, they did not foresee an increased transmission risk in the absence of block assignments. Had they anticipated a greater risk, they would have required block assignments again this semester. In addition to high-quality learning, placements scheduled over the entire semester offer students more opportunities to replace clinical days lost due to illness or while awaiting test results and by doing so, increases the likelihood of graduating on schedule. That said, there is no perfect approach to clinical placement assignments, especially within the context of the ongoing pandemic, but for a range of reasons it is too late to change our approach now.

- **Community isolation** is recommended by the **MSSS** for all students in clinical placements and should be strictly followed when living with higher-risk individuals;
- **Separating work and home clothing** is recommended by some of our clinical partners. Use one set of clothes for work, wash it daily, take a shower upon returning home;
- Another option would be for you **to self-isolate within your home** (e.g., in your bedroom and using a separate bathroom), if this is feasible.

Travel

The Government of Canada announced on January 3rd that it will require travelers to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test performed no earlier than 72 hours prior to boarding the flight before their arrival in Canada, in order to be admitted into the country. A [mandatory quarantine](#) of 14 days will still be required after entering the country, even with a negative test result. The Government is also strongly discouraging all non-essential travel.

Mental health

Stress levels for all of us remain very high. Please note that the **Student Wellness Hub** will continue offering essential in-person medical services, by appointment only. All other services will continue to be [available remotely](#). In addition, the **WELL Office's** counsellor assigned to ISoN students (Emily Wasylenko) continues to offer sessions in 2021 and students can book the next available appointment directly from [Emily's Calendly account](#).

Students in distress can:

1. Follow the steps indicated in Emily's *Calendly* account, under the heading "*If you are experiencing high levels of distress*"; or

2. Make use of the emergency resources available on the WELL Office's [Emergency Contacts](#) page.

In addition, the [keep.meSAFE](#) app continues to be a great option for all of our students. It is completely free, unlimited and is offered to students in partnership with the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) and the Post Graduate Students' Society (PGSS). It provides 24/7/365 access to licensed counsellors through telephone and mobile chat in over 60 languages. To access this service, download the MySSP app for [Apple iOS](#) or [Android](#). You can learn more about this service on [SSMU's website](#).

III. SUMMER CLINICAL COURSES

Dates of Summer courses for 2021 will not be changed, with the exception of BScN U2 clinical courses. For students in that cohort, courses will begin May 1st and end on June 20th, 2021. This lengthened Summer session will allow this cohort to complete two blocked courses with this single session. The result will be that from June 21st onward, the disruptions made to the BScN U2 cohort program of study from March 2020 as a result of COVID-19 will have been resolved. On that day, I would suggest that partying be planned! By Zoom, if still required, or any other format that follows public-health guidelines at the time while allowing you to celebrate what you've been able to do in a single academic year to 'catch up' – your year will have been a long one and we all recognize it!

IV. FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR NURSING STUDENTS

Several students have asked about the possibility of receiving compensation (separate from the government's BNI student-bursary program) since they have had to leave jobs to attend their clinical stages in alignment with the mobility restrictions in place to decrease transmission rates across health care institutions. I have addressed this issue in a [previous update](#). Students are encouraged to reach out to McGill's [Scholarships and Student Aid Office](#) for support options related to the COVID-19 situation. The Dean of Students has reassured me that there were funds donated to McGill for this purpose and that he has made the Student Aid Office aware that you may be submitting requests to them for this purpose. Compensation for exposure to COVID-19 was also mentioned but, as you can imagine, the number of individuals exposed is too great for this to be feasible.

V. BNI BURSARY PROGRAM

In response to the government's bursary program, we sent all necessary information to all 328 BNI students. This resulted in 16 applicants from ISoN. This level of uptake was similar to our sister universities in Montreal. To better understand why the uptake was so low, I requested feedback from BNI program elected student representatives and Program Directors (PDs). This was

summarized and I subsequently shared the responses with the Vice Provost, the Dean, the Directors of Nursing of our main clinical partners, and at larger ministerial meetings. My goal was to provide these decision makers with information that would allow them to create or advocate for a new or revised program that would be more responsive to your concerns. My sincerest appreciation to your representatives for their feedback, to those of you who shared with them, and to your PDs for their excellent summary of the issues. It is this type of information, provided to me rapidly, that facilitates positive changes at the ministerial level and is a great example of our role as nurses, as advocates for the benefit of society. Again, thank you!

Please do not hesitate to share any concerns or questions you may have with your elected NUS and NGSA representatives, or feel free to send your feedback to me directly through my assistant, Irina Cazac, at directoradmin.nursing@mcgill.ca.

Best regards and stay safe,



Anita J. Gagnon RN, MPH, PhD
Associate Dean and Director
Ingram School of Nursing
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Cc: McGill Dean of Students
 FMHS Communications Office
 ISON-based faculty and staff