

Re: Weekly COVID-19 related update from the Director

November 17, 2020

Dear Students,

This is the third weekly update related to your studies at the Ingram School of Nursing (ISoN) in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as part of our continuing efforts to provide clarity and transparency in decision-making by ISoN leadership, as well as our rationale for decisions made. Please note that these updates are archived on our website [here](#).

In addition to these weekly messages from me, please note that starting this Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> through to December 22<sup>nd</sup> from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. EST, I will be hosting weekly Town Halls, open to all ISoN students via [Zoom](#). The day of the week and time were chosen by your NUS and NGSA representatives as optimal, given your schedules. We have coordinated to send out the weekly updates every Tuesday to enable you to review the latest news and formulate your questions ahead of each Town Hall. A separate invitation went out to all students yesterday evening, as has communication from members of your student leadership associations.

Since my last message sent to you on [November 11<sup>th</sup>](#), I have met with ISoN student leadership members (NUS and NGSA presidents; BScN and BNI VP Academics), the Director of Nursing of Quebec based at the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux (MSSS), as well as the Deans, Associate Deans, and Directors of faculties and schools of nursing across Quebec. These meetings and several others inform this week's update.

I will cover six issues this week: (1) travelling between Fall and Winter semesters; (2) revised directives on mask wearing; (3) applying worked hours towards course credits for BNI students; (4) work-related financial aid; (5) Tier-2 winter courses; and (6) student concerns re: exposure to COVID-19.

### *I. TRAVELLING BETWEEN FALL AND WINTER SEMESTERS*

The discrepancy previously noted in the Quebec government's travel instructions mentioned in my November 11<sup>th</sup> message has been found to be irrelevant. The "students" category used in those texts *does not apply* to students in health-profession programs (i.e., nursing, medicine, physical and occupational therapy, etc.). Instead, travel restrictions for health-profession students are addressed within MSSS directives related to "internships" (AKA 'clinical placements') in,

[“Recommandations intérimaires concernant les stages en santé en contexte de pandémie de la COVID-19”](#) (as of September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020). ISoN is joining Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) sister schools in using these to inform questions of holiday travel. **Students should refer to this document to inform themselves of the potential for travel during the holiday break.** An algorithm is provided on the last page which is particularly helpful. Note that the algorithm refers to ‘éclosion’ (outbreak), which is operationally defined as at least two confirmed cases in less than 14 days that cannot be explained by a link outside of the milieu (e.g. : 2 cases within the same family). An outbreak is declared when Public Health leaders identify transmission of COVID-19 within the milieu in question. ([Une éclosion se définit par au moins deux cas confirmés, en moins de 14 jours, ne pouvant être expliqués par un lien en dehors du milieu \(ex. : 2 cas d’une même famille\). Une éclosion signifie que la Direction de santé publique a identifié une transmission de COVID-19 dans le milieu.](#)) ‘TAAN’ refers to testing for COVID-19, specifically ‘tests d’amplification des acides nucléiques’, (nucleic acid amplification tests).

***If students are hoping to travel outside of Quebec, COVID directives of the relevant local areas, provinces, territories, and countries should be consulted prior to travel and followed stringently, in addition to the directives of Quebec’s MSSS.***

Be aware of the potential need to self-isolate both at your travel destination and upon your return to Montreal. There is a great deal of variation by program and year as regards Fall end-dates for in-person activities. You may wish to confirm the final date with your Course Coordinator. Then use this date + the Winter course in-person start date + the ministerial directives at your travel destination + the Quebec algorithm to assess whether there is adequate time to self-isolate at either end and therefore worth the travel or not in each of your particular cases.

*Travel-related student Qs & As:*

- A student petition to McGill to delay the Winter semester start date was brought to my attention by your representatives. ISoN has not been informed of any change in this regard. At this time, since we do not envision being able to reduce the planned lab and clinical days, even if McGill postpones the start of Winter semester, ISoN might not be able to do so.
- Requests for switching clinical ‘blocks’ to accommodate international travellers required to self-isolate for 2 weeks upon return to Canada was raised. This is still under consideration.

## II. REVISED DIRECTIVES ON MASK WEARING

As outlined in the [McGill Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Update sent out yesterday, Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>](#), there are now updated requirements for mask or face covering use, as per the [Public Health Agency of Canada's recommendations](#). It is now recommended that masks or face coverings are worn when:

- You're in public and you might come into close contact with others;
- You're in shared indoor spaces with people from outside your immediate household;
- Advised by your local public health authority.

This means that all nursing students must now wear a mask at all times while in the 680 Sherbrooke building, even when distancing 2 meters or more. The only time when you may remove your mask is to eat, which is best to be done alone and in a closed space. We are actively looking into our ISON spaces to assess this possibility further and we will confirm in a forthcoming message. The rationale for these additional restrictions is that the COVID-19 virus can be passed in droplets (hence, use of a mask if closer than 2 meters) and in airborne particles (which can travel further than 2 meters and therefore merit use of a mask). The most common transmission site for healthcare workers is *not* on the clinical floors from infected patients but rather, in eating areas from each other, over lunch or coffee.

## III. BNI STUDENT CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

As referenced in my last message, there has been a great deal of interest from the government of Quebec to enlist BNI (commonly referred to in Quebec as 'DEC-BAC') students to support the healthcare system to a greater extent than is currently the case. The MES (Ministry of Enseignement Supérieur) has sent directives to all Quebec universities and colleges (CEGEPs) with programs of nursing to count worked hours for course credit. There remains no consensus at the provincial level on how to implement these directives. For the moment, decisions will be made by each university-clinical partner dyad.

A subgroup of provincial leaders meets weekly to discuss this item, which serves as a forum to which Deans, Associate Deans, and Directors of Nursing may bring their concerns. ISON leadership remains vigilant in maintaining our priorities – your health and safety and your academic success.

#### *IV. WORK-RELATED FINANCIAL AID*

Financial aid for students who are required to quit their jobs in order to comply with MSSS directives related to clinical placements was brought to my attention. The Dean of Students was sent information on this ministerial directive and planned to follow up with the appropriate people in the Financial Aid Office to explain the extenuating situation.

#### *V. TIER-2 WINTER COURSES*

In my last update to you on November 11th, I spoke about Tier-2 courses. These are courses with components that may be better offered in-person on campus but that can also be delivered remotely and as such are not considered to be Tier 1 (i.e., courses with components which cannot be delivered unless in-person). The university is considering Tier-2 courses for the Winter semester however, Tier 2 courses will only become operational if Montreal moves from being in a red zone to an orange zone. Furthermore, students would not be required to attend course components in-person.

#### *VI. STUDENT CONCERNS RE: EXPOSURE TO COVID-19*

At the beginning of this semester, students were provided with a detailed guide entitled 'Student Guide to Clinical Placements in the Context of COVID-19: Your Safety and Professional Responsibilities'. This document instructs you to self-screen via a questionnaire prior to going to your clinical placement. By way of this guide, you are instructed NOT to proceed with your clinical placements if you are experiencing any symptoms of, or suspected exposure to, COVID-19 and we provided detailed instructions to follow to inform the appropriate authorities. You are also advised in the guide that should you have a prolonged absence due to COVID-19, you should contact your Program Director so that a contingency plan can be made. **No student testing positive for COVID-19 has ever, under any circumstances, been forced to attend their clinical internships or lab courses, nor will they be.**

