

Re: Weekly COVID-19 related update from the Director

November 11, 2020

Dear Students,

This is the first of weekly updates I will be sending to you related to your studies at the Ingram School of Nursing (ISoN) in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I understand the need for clarity and transparency in decision-making by ISoN leadership, as well as the rationale for the decisions. My aim is to fulfill these requests by way of this weekly update. Please note that these updates will be archived on our website [here](#).

I enjoyed meeting with a few of you last Tuesday (November 3<sup>rd</sup>) morning and hearing your concerns. I subsequently met with the Dean of Students who had also heard from a couple of ISoN students.

I will cover five main issues this week: (1) travelling between Fall and Winter semesters; (2) safety of student clinical placements; (3) BNI student Fall and Winter clinical placements; (4) study-work challenges; and (5) Winter 2021 semester.

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

There is no new information that would give rise to changing what was included in [my email to you of October 30<sup>th</sup>](#). At this time, the School does not envision being able to accommodate any students who are unable to meet self-isolation requirements before the start of Winter lab and clinical courses. Any absence could result in significant delays in your course of study. As in all decisions made by ISoN leadership, two priorities were foremost in our minds when considering the various options: (1) **Your health and safety** and that of your colleagues, patients, hospital staff and ISoN faculty and staff (i.e., following Canadian and Quebec public-health directives and McGill guidelines defined for this purpose and encouraging use of mental-health resources) and (2) **Your academic success** (i.e., ensuring that learning objectives are met to enable you to practice nursing competently and confidently, and doing so in a timely fashion to allow for graduation on schedule).

Key elements used to make the October 30<sup>th</sup> decision are as follows:

- **Provincial [COVID directives](#)** currently state that residents of a region or territory now designated as a **red zone** (= maximum alert, the current status of Montreal) must **avoid travelling to green, yellow or orange zones AND outside Quebec**, except for essential travel (workers, shared-child custody and freight transportation). Note that self-isolation is not required for those arriving from other provinces to a red zone but this becomes irrelevant for ISoN students in Montreal for the Fall

semester, since the previous sentence prohibits students from leaving Montreal in the first place. In addition, we have noted a discrepancy in what the [Quebec government has instructed with respect to inter-regional travel within the province](#); while students are listed as part of the exceptional categories, there again, provincial COVID directives prohibit students from leaving Montreal in the first place. We are keeping a close watch on this discrepancy and I will provide more information in a forthcoming weekly update.

- **Ministry of Health directives** for clinical settings which include ensuring students maintain *community isolation (limited mobility between regions and, in the healthcare setting, between different organizations)* during their placements and **requiring for 7-14 days of isolation between clinical placements**. The duration of isolation required is determined by, and dependent on, the type of unit to which students are assigned, the level of alert of the zone in which students reside, and if students have knowingly or possibly been exposed to COVID-19. In addition, Ministry of Health directives specify that future healthcare professionals must be very vigilant about universal precautions and measures with respect to their personal, family and social lives.
- **McGill [University COVID health guidelines](#)** which specify that travelers who have come to Canada are required to self-isolate for 14 days before returning to on-campus classes.
- **Mental-health resource availability** to McGill students is being assured by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) including the [keep.meSAFE](#) app, as well as activities planned for the semester break.
- **OIIQ/other provincial, Canadian, and US-state requirements for schools of nursing** include expectations of content to be included, skills to be mastered, populations with whom to practice nursing, required numbers of hours of clinical practice, and competencies to be obtained in order to be able to graduate and sit for licensing exams offered by these organizations and/or for the academic program in which you are registered and ISON itself to be accredited.
- **Potential perception of “COVID graduates”** as being less prepared than other students by nursing colleagues in clinical areas.
- **McGill University Senate approved calendar** defines the Fall semester end as December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 and the Winter semester start as January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
- **Sister Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) professional schools**, including the Schools of Physical and Occupational Therapy, Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Medicine are all maintaining the Senate-approved start date for the Winter semester.
- **Clinical-partner requirements** for student clinical placements are defined by each clinical partner independent of the others. At minimum, they must consider: how their institution’s Infection Control Office is operationalizing ministerial directives; staffing levels; patient mix; requests from and commitments to other nursing schools; the number of students allowed on a given unit on each

shift and each day of the week including weekends; supervisory capability of their nurses on all those shifts; and space availability for student and faculty meetings.

- **Residual effects of COVID-19 Wave 1** including the fact that certain student cohorts had their clinical courses delayed or cancelled entirely, resulting in a domino effect whereby clinical courses planned for the subsequent semester had to be delayed. With additional delays in access to clinical sites, nursing skill and assessment 'refresher' time is required before beginning clinical courses again.
- **Equity among students** in the same program cohorts regarding Fall semester end- and Winter semester start-dates.
- **Scheduling requirements** including consideration of: constraints to lab access due to increased demand; scheduling enough clinical days to allow for up to 14 days for self-isolation while awaiting test results, recovering from COVID-19, or changing placements sites; and balancing clinical-placement timing with the integration of learning of theoretical material.

In *one program cohort (BScN U2)*, in order to progress towards graduation, lab and clinical requirements must be met this Winter, so that the cohort can be poised to complete two clinical courses in the Summer and finish their year at the end of June rather than in early June, as would usually be the case. *Other BScN cohorts* have not been in a hospital setting since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in March. For *all cohorts*, the Winter in-person start dates were selected to either: (1) leave enough time to frontload lab activities required to permit adequate preparation for return to the clinical areas; (2) begin clinical placements early enough to ensure that the number of days usually required to meet learning objectives are available to every student; or (3) a combination of the two.

As the result of the November 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with some of you, we are currently:

- Assessing whether ***on-campus/in-person activity end-dates could be advanced to be completed earlier*** in the Fall semester, thus offering the possibility for travel (if allowed by provincial and federal governments at that time) with enough remaining time for two weeks of isolation prior to the start of the Winter semester;
- Re-assessing if there is any possibility of ***beginning in-person lab or clinical course components later*** than the first week of the Winter semester;
- Advocating for ***campus activities*** for students over the holidays (through the Office of the Dean of Students);
- Advocating for availability of ***'hot-line' and wellness services*** over the holidays (through the Office of the Dean of Students);

- Developing a **tracking system** for student mobility and community isolation, which is vital in our commitment to protect our students, clinical partners and patients in the clinical settings.

## II. SAFETY OF STUDENT CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

To ensure your health and safety, we are following all the recommended guidelines previously cited in this document. These encompass specific activities such as: ensuring that you have access to adequate PPE; adequate space for social distancing during your on-campus studies; and supporting McGill campus-led contact tracing. The rules applied by our clinical partners for student learning in their sites act as a second layer of safety and security for you. The School has decided to not allow students (excluding Nurse Practitioner (NP) students under certain circumstances) to be present for aerosol-generating procedures performed on COVID+ or suspected+ patients. This, in turn, makes the need for N95 mask-fitting and use unnecessary for ISON students and in so doing, avoids any situation a student might find his or herself in where there is an apparent insufficient supply of N95 masks.

## III. BNI STUDENT CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

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 health care system to a greater extent than is currently the case. This is due to the fact that DEC-BAC students have already graduated from collegial nursing programs and most have, or will have, licenses to practice nursing while studying for their undergraduate degrees. Consensus has yet to be reached provincially regarding the feasibility of the currently proposed solution of having all DEC-BAC students work more for their current employers (there is no mention of unemployed DEC-BAC students) and having universities apply those worked hours towards course credits. In these negotiations, ISON leadership remains vigilant in maintaining our priorities – your health and safety and, *key in these discussions, your academic success.*

## IV. STUDY-WORK CHALLENGES

For many of our Nurse-Entry, BNI, and PhD students, we understand that there are specific challenges with respect to work-life balance in the context of COVID-19 involving increased work demands in tandem with the requirements of your studies. We encourage students to reach out to their Course Coordinator if they are having difficulty keeping up with their course work. Know that faculty are concerned for your wellbeing and will support you to the best of their ability.

## V. WINTER 2021 SEMESTER

Most courses will continue to be offered remotely and asynchronously (i.e., students will be able to access the course material at a time that best suits their needs), with exceptions including but not limited to clinical courses, lab courses and Nurse-Practitioner (NP) exams, which will be offered

on-site in Montreal, and PhD courses, which may be synchronous. ISON has identified “Tier 2” courses (i.e., those with the potential for delivering components of their courses in-person) scheduled during the Winter semester. The details of Tier 2 course delivery are just beginning to be considered and are unlikely to be available for some time. Please note that all ISON students have access to [study hubs](#) on campus and you are encouraged you make use of these.

COVID-19 is a new and daunting experience for all of us. We have had to find new ways of working, studying, and of living. I want to thank you all for all your hard work and your continued dedication to your studies. Please do not hesitate to share any concerns or questions you may have with your elected NUS and NGSA representatives, our NSAO staff, or feel free to send your feedback to me directly through my assistant, Irina Cazac, at [directoradmin.nursing@mcgill.ca](mailto:directoradmin.nursing@mcgill.ca).

Best regards and stay safe,



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