

Guidance to Education Programs: Compliance with Accreditation Standards COVID-19 Pandemic

March 26, 2020

Physiotherapy Education Accreditation Canada (PEAC) recognizes that this is a challenging time for educators, students, their programs and their institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the need to significantly alter program operations, including program delivery, temporarily. These changes may affect a program's ongoing compliance with accreditation standards and criteria.

The guidance within this document is provided with the understanding that it is based on information available about the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 26, 2020 and that adjustments may be required in the future as the situation evolves.

Our guidance is based on the following principles:

- We trust that institutions, programs, and program faculty will make decisions that are in the best interest of their students and the public. We trust that program faculty are best positioned to make those decisions, with most pertinent knowledge of their programs' situation and impact of directives from their own institution and public health authority/authorities.
- Programs and PEAC have a shared goal to graduate physiotherapists who are competent, safe, entry-level practitioners.
- Programs are accountable to institutional policies and processes, including those related to academic integrity, student promotion and progression, and student achievement of learning outcomes.
- Not all eventualities may yet have been realized during the pandemic. While efforts at this time have primarily focussed on finding ways to secure the graduation of the students in the 2020 graduating cohort, there may be impacts on the 2021 graduating cohort that will need consideration. In the future we may see:
 - institutions waiting until September 2020 or beyond to resume in-person classes
 - the deferral of 2020 admissions to entry-level programs

- challenges in attaining clinical placements due to health system burnout and insufficient clinical sites to accommodate two cohorts concurrently
- future institutional, provincial or federal directives that we have not yet envisioned

Our goal is to support programs by providing guidance on considerations related to accreditation requirements while taking a pragmatic approach.

Accreditation Reviews

Programs with confirmed dates for accreditation reviews in 2021 will be offered the opportunity to defer the review. If a deferral is accepted, an extension to the accreditation award expiry date will be made. The length of time of the deferral will be determined collaboratively on a case-by-case basis. Programs scheduled for accreditation review in 2022 and beyond can apply for a deferral in accordance with policy [ACC-08: Deferral of Accreditation Review](#).

Progress Reviews

Programs with Progress Report due dates in 2020 will be offered the opportunity to defer submission. If a deferral is accepted, the length of time of the deferral will be determined collaboratively on a case-by-case basis.

Substantive Change

Policy [ACC-04 Substantive Change](#) requires the submission of a substantive change report within two months of institutional approval of a major curriculum revision, including pedagogy. During the COVID-19 pandemic:

PEAC WILL NOT require submission of a substantive change report for any temporary changes made to pedagogy, including changes to curriculum sequence, a move to online learning, or a change to online assessment of student achievement.
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Clinical Education Experience

Accreditation criterion 4.3 seeks evidence that programs have a required mix of clinical education experience designed to encompass essential areas of practice and settings across the lifespan and that enables students to achieve the required competencies. The required mix typically reflects the [Clinical Education Guidelines](#), in particular:

- a minimum of 100 hours of experience in each of cardiovascular/respiratory, neurological and musculoskeletal conditions
- experience in acute, rehabilitation/long term care, and ambulatory care

- experience working with patients of a variety of ages across the lifespan

Additionally evidence is submitted to demonstrate that:

4.3.1 Each student attains the required mix as defined by the program.

4.3.2 Each student attains a minimum of 1025 hours of clinical education experience; the majority of these hours shall be under the supervision of a licensed/registered physiotherapist.

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

PEAC WILL require

- that students complete 1025 hours of clinical education experience prior to graduation.

PEAC WILL NOT require

- that students complete a program's required mix of clinical education experiences prior to graduation.

Discussions regarding alternative ways to meet the 1025-hour requirement are ongoing. At this time we agree that tele-rehabilitation is considered to be direct patient care and can be included in the 1025 hours. The consideration of simulation requires discussion regarding scope and further definition. We will continue to explore this collaboratively with educators in order to provide more direction.

We are available to assist programs on an individual basis as necessary while we all do our best to adapt to our new reality. Please don't hesitate to be in touch.

On behalf of PEAC's Accreditation Committee and Board of Directors,

Kathy Davidson,
Executive Director, PEAC