

## DEPARTMENT COVID-19 UPDATE #5 – March 22, 2020

### To all members of the Department:

That was a tough week for all of us, but portends what is likely to happen over the days ahead. As we cope with these new challenges, at a time when we are going to be increasingly apart physically, emotional connections and interactions remain so important not only for work related issues but also for support and comfort. And for that reason I am going to be doing what others are starting to do, and that is to no longer use the phrase social distancing, replacing it instead with “physical distancing”, while continuing to emphasise social cohesion.

Regular Updates and Zoom meetings can obviously help, but if anyone is finding it particularly hard to cope, either because of the stress of the situation or their own personal circumstances, please contact any member of our Department’s Leadership Team – Karen Saperson, Sheila Harms, Harriet MacMillan, Margaret McKinnon, Bev Pindar-Donick or me - and we will do whatever we can to connect you with the assistance you need.

I also want to draw your attention to an initiative by McMaster healthcare students who are offering support to healthcare workers, administrators & support staff, and students who are seeking childcare, grocery runs, pharmacy runs, pet care, general errands, etc. in the Hamilton, Waterloo, Niagara, Peel, and Halton regions. For more info or to sign up, please visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/s7a4oqr>

And once again I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all of you who have worked so tirelessly since this crisis began, and who have really stepped up to take on new roles and responsibilities. And particular thanks to those members of our Department and all our frontline colleagues at St. Joseph's Healthcare (SJH) and Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) and beyond, who are facing additional personal risks every day. It has been amazing to see how you have all responded, knowing that each of us is likely to be asked to do even more in the days ahead.

### Updates

#### Clinical Programs

**The HHS Child and Youth Mental Health Program** is no longer accepting new referrals, other than patients seen through Emergency. The program has developed a high risk support team to support current patients, but can’t support people who aren’t already part of program.

**SJH** The MHAP is now providing telephone support to physicians and community partners through CONNECT

**Redeployment of faculty and learners** Changing our roles and responsibilities to meet the increasing needs in particular areas (eg PES, In-Patient and C-L services, and diversion services) is now a priority across the system. On Saturday the provincial government gave hospitals the right for the next two weeks to begin redeployment plans of its staff. Their changes, which supersede collective agreements, may include changing work assignments and changing work

schedules including leaves. At Hamilton Health Sciences, this will be coordinated through a new Central Redeployment Centre.

### Research

The **Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)** is currently preparing a package, to be released in the next few days, that aims to mitigate the impact of this situation on researchers, trainees, lab staff and research administrators. In the meantime, researchers are encouraged to consult the [COVID-19 webpage on CIHR's website](#).

**Cyber security** The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS) has identified an active, sophisticated cyber campaign targeting COVID-19 researchers, using ransomware that could hinder the activity of research groups. The attack begins with a phishing email. The CCCS is asking researchers, especially those working on COVID-19 related research, to exercise elevated levels of caution with email attachments and links. More information about the attack is available at the [CCCS website](#). Additional cybersecurity information and resources can be found at the [McMaster AVP/CTO website](#).

**New Directives for all McMaster Researchers** The university now requires that all McMaster research that does not fall under the parameters for “essential research” as noted in the link below to be closed down by Tuesday March 24 at 5 p.m. [New Directives for McMaster Researchers](#)

To have your research deemed essential you will need to complete a request form to continue research activity and send it to me. It will then go to Jonathan Bramson, the Faculty's vice-dean, research and then to the acting VP, research for McMaster for approval, but this is not automatic. A priority for me and Margaret is to ensure that researchers and research staff visit our buildings and labs (or travel from home) as little as is absolutely necessary and ideally not at all. Most of the care of animals will be provided by CAF staff.

### Education

**Meeting of education leads** The leads of all of our education program will now be meeting daily to exchange information and plan together.

#### **Psychiatry Residency Programs**

- **OTN** Thanks to the efforts of one of our residents, we have worked out how residents can access OTN. JoAnn Corey can provide the information if you don't have it.
- **Curriculum:** We are continuing with the Virtual Wednesday Academic Half Days, including most of the Enrichment Sessions and all of the Academic Half Day sessions. Natasha Snelgrove will be taking on an extended role in curriculum development, developing learning materials that will assist with the virtual sessions, as well as supplementing what residents might have missed on any rotations that have been cut short.
- **Royal College Written Fellowship Exams** have now been postponed until at least the fall.

## Psychology residents

- HHS is frontloading their virtual curriculum to get as much covered as soon as possible. Residents are still participating in the problem-based learning (PBL) sessions with the child psychiatry residents.

**Fellows** All fellowship programs are currently being reviewed, to see which fellows could be redeployed to assist in maintaining our key frontline services.

**RCT psychology residents** are now working remotely from home. There will be a virtual town hall to address any RCT student concerns on Tuesday, March 24 at 4 p.m. (information about how to connect will follow shortly)

**Undergraduate Medical Program** Clerks have now been withdrawn from all clinical settings until at least July 6<sup>th</sup>. A "Virtual Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship" (all large group sessions, via WebEx) is expected to run April 13th to June 26th across all 3 campuses. Our Department will be responsible for teaching about 8 (1.5 hour) sessions. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Vanessa as soon as possible.

## Department

**Department website** Links are being added to our website daily

<https://psychiatry.mcmaster.ca/news-events/covid-19> . I would like to highlight one recent article on the role of psychiatrists in managing stress during a pandemic which includes Ana Hategan and Alan Eppel as co-authors

<https://journalofpsychiatryreform.com/2020/03/19/while-youre-social-distancing-the-role-of-psychiatrists-during-pandemics/>.

**Zoom** If anyone has any questions about accessing zoom, please contact Bev ([pindon@mcmaster.ca](mailto:pindon@mcmaster.ca)). Licences are free for conferences of no longer than 40 minutes at a time. And a reminder that for every Zoom call there is a telephone number at the bottom of the invitation, which can be used without having to register for zoom, just as you would for any other teleconference.

**Our wellness working group** If you're interested in joining this virtual group, or have any useful resources or ways in which we can maintain our wellness, please let Karen Saperson know. I am attaching an excellent article by Mamta Gautam entitled "Ensuring Our Own Wellbeing as We Care for Others During the COVID-19 Crisis" which will also be on our website.

## Hospital / University Policy Updates

### Clarification on staff return from travel

The latest guidelines from both Hospitals now state that all staff who have travelled outside of Canada need to self-isolate for 14 days starting after the day of their return to Canada. Day 1 of isolation is the day after their return to Canada. Staff can return to work on Day 15. They need to self-monitor during this time and follow previous instructions regarding actions to take should

symptoms develop. In rare exceptions the staff member - if they fill a critical role and are asymptomatic - may be requested to work during the self-isolation time by their supervisor or medical lead.

**COVID-19 and the workplace** If someone is suspected, but not identified as having COVID-19 and has been in the workplace, the issue should be addressed by their supervisor, who can find guidance in the McMaster COVID-19 guide for supervisors: <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/03/Supervisors-Guide-COVID-19.pdf>

**Pregnancy** There is no evidence that either individuals who are pregnant or their babies are at higher risk of complications from exposure to COVID 19. Staff and doctors who are pregnant will be expected to work with COVID-19 patients but postgraduate learners who are pregnant have been directed not to have contact with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

**And on the lighter side....** A tweet from a mum who is home schooling her children: “Not a great day! 2 students suspended for fighting, and a teacher disciplined for drinking on the job.”

Nick Kates