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## **COMMUNICATION TO RMOs AND REGISTRARS REGARDING COVID-19 IMPACT**

The WA Department of Health, Health Executive Committee (HEC) has determined that junior doctor rotations within the Western Australian health system need to be restricted considering the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration. This decision is based upon the following principles:

1. The need to minimise movement within and between our facilities;
2. The impost of the requirements for orientation at change of terms, including area specific infection prevention and control training;
3. The steep learning curve related to the change in terms, as junior doctors familiarise themselves with their new environment, clinical case mix and case load;
4. The service benefits to the hospitals of a longer duration attachment to clinical units;
5. The need to provide levels of stability and certainty in very uncertain times.

The State of Emergency gives the authority to redeploy staff where required to meet the service needs of the system. Ideally the redeployment position should match as far as possible the seniority, skill set and professional interests of the individual. This is not a decision that has been taken lightly.

Interns and RMOs will enter their new rotations as of 30 March 2020 (6 April 2020 for those who are doing a 4-term rotation) and can expect to remain in that role at least until 17 August 2020.

Until further advised registrars will remain in their current terms.

This situation will be reviewed frequently in line with the unfolding impact of COVID-19 on our community. This includes advice as of 25 March 2020 that all but Category 1 surgery will be cancelled which may impact on your rotations.

This obviously raises several concerns and considerations:

- **Mandatory requirements for general registration**
  - We have reassurance from the Medical Board of Australia that in these extraordinary times they will be flexible and considered in their deliberations. Refer to [www.ahpra.gov.au/News/COVID-19](http://www.ahpra.gov.au/News/COVID-19) for information on registration and COVID queries.
  - All Primary Employing Health Services (PEHS) will ensure their actions in the recovery phase will be focused on minimising the risk of mandatory criteria not being met.

- **WACHS rotations**

- The WACHS rotations out of PEHSs are essential to meet the workforce needs in our regional hospitals and are highly regarded by junior doctors for a range of reasons;
- Junior doctors may not be able or willing to undertake 2 or more rotations in a WACHS site. This will be accommodated on a case by case basis.

- **High activity and low activity rotations**

- It is noted that rotations through ED, ICU, AMU etc may be exhausting, particularly when associated with 24-hour shift work;
- No-one will want to do consecutive leave relief terms;
- However, these rotations can provide some amazing experience and learning opportunities;
- Junior doctors will be given the option of continuing or changing out of these rotations.

- **Prerequisites for specialist training entry**

- It is noted that many of you are expecting to have a specific term as a prerequisite for entry into your preferred specialist training program. It needs to be understood that we are in extraordinary times. The HSPs will be doing their best to ensure your training program entry is not compromised.

- **Requirements for specialist training programs**

- The Specialist colleges have all acknowledged that trainees may be required to undertake duties by their employer which are not aligned with the requirements of the training program. All the Specialist colleges are supportive of the value of experiential learnings for trainees in emergency situations and have committed to a flexible and fair response to consideration of substitution of time-based programs with competency and experience.

- **Six-month contracts**

- There are a small number of people who will be concerned about how they will be affected for the second half of the year if they have “split” contracts. We do not know the answer to this question, but the forthcoming weeks may bring us some clarity. We do have a little bit of time up our sleeves.

We understand that many juniors are concerned they may not undertake the rotations expected. We acknowledge intern concerns that general registration may be delayed; residents' concerns that entry into vocational training and registrar concerns about delaying your completion of training. We understand many of you may be disappointed that your dreams and aspirations are not going to be met during 2020. We also seek to reassure you that this is expected to be a brief disruption to your overall career.

The world is facing disruption, fear of uncertainty, fear of poverty, fear of death and fear of the disruption of the fabric of society as we know it. As medical professionals, we are in a position of privilege. We are leaders in our communities, in our facilities and (sometimes)

in our homes. It is because of our position we need to show strength, leadership and solidarity. We need to be grateful for what we have and to act in a calm, sensible and measured manner, and to treat each other with kindness & compassion.

It is not often in your career that you will confront a pandemic, but this is your opportunity to be truly extraordinary. Our community needs us right now and this is our opportunity to step up in ways we probably never envisaged.

I appreciate that some of you may be feeling overwhelmed, anxious, stressed, or simply may want to have the opportunity to talk things through with someone. In Western Australia, we are very fortunate to have the Doctors Health Advisory Service (DHASWA) which provides:

- a website that details resources available to help stressed doctors [www.dhaswa.com.au](http://www.dhaswa.com.au)
- a list of GPs and Psychiatrists interested in treating doctors and medical students
- a 24/7 call advice line that any doctor or medical student can ring if they are feeling overwhelmed or simply want to talk to someone. The line is staffed by experienced GPs who will listen and provide advice on further action if needed; call 08 9321 3098

PMCWA, the Australian Medical Association (WA) and your Specialist Medical College are sources of information and support, and we are here to support you through this time of unprecedented change. Please also ensure that you maintain a close working relationship with your PGME teams, Directors of Clinical Training and medical workforce officers.

An interesting article on doctors during COVID-19 can be found here: <https://endurancedocintraining.wordpress.com/2020/03/23/an-open-letter-to-interns-in-the-time-of-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR2CtADwFHzyZuhqrdtdm99th5exbXjEia1qNqyyWU9h-jvTcgJmaDupcZ0>

*...You don't have to have all the answers, you don't have to suddenly be a registrar because there is a pandemic. Work within your scope and ask for guidance when you need it. Keep yourself safe and you will help keep your patients safe. Last week one of my consultants said, "Not often in one's lifetime do you get the opportunity to be truly extraordinary. We have that chance now, so let's be extraordinary." We never thought it would go down like this, but we will walk beside you as it does...*

Yours sincerely



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