HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDICAL AND DENTAL PROFESSIONS BOARD

COMMITTEE FOR MEDICAL SCIENCE

POLICY REGARDING INTERN MEDICAL SCIENTISTS AND TRAINING OF INTERN MEDICAL SCIENTISTS

1. INTRODUCTION

There are three Medical Scientist Registers: Medical Biological Scientists (MW), Medical Physicists (PH), and Genetic Counsellors (GR), each with specific regulations for academic qualifications and internship training. In addition, Medical Biological Scientists may register in one or more professional category as among the following: Pathology (Haematology, Anatomical Pathology, Chemical Pathology/Biochemistry, Microbiology/Virology, Immunology, Molecular Biology, Analytical Chemistry or Pharmacology), Cell Biology (Radiation Biology or Reproductive Biology) Genetics.

In order to become a professional medical scientist in the registration category Independent Practice in South Africa, i.e. registered with the Medical and Dental Professions Board, the formal academic requirements stipulated for a specific medical science register must have been completed as well as the relevant internship.

Registration as a Medical Scientist in the category Student does not require internship training and implies that the Medical Scientist is studying towards a degree that may lead into the profession of Medical Science.

FULL CERTIFIED DOCUMENTATION IS ESSENTIAL FOR REGISTRATION.

1.1 Upon registration as an intern-medical scientist an applicant must comply with one of the criteria below:

a) submit proof of having completed appropriate academic requirements

b) submit proof of registration for an accredited MSc(Genetic Counselling) degree of at least 24 months duration, full time (applicable only to GR)

Facilities accredited for internship training are obliged to provide candidates for internship training with details concerning registration since intern medical scientists are legally required to register with the Committee for Medical Science prior to commencement with the internship.

1.2 The intern medical scientist, the supervising medical scientist(s) or medical specialist(s) and the accredited training facilities are jointly responsible for ensuring that the registration of an intern medical scientist with the Board takes place prior to the commencement of the internship.
1.3 Registration as a professional medical scientist is possible only after –

a) the relevant academic requirements have been **COMPLETED**, 

b) the internship has been **SATISFACTORILY COMPLETED** and the candidate has been **SUCCESSFUL IN AN EXAMINATION** as determined by the board (definition of “examination” in this context means an assessment of competency conducted by an educational institution approved by the board or examiners appointed by the board), and the appropriate documentation has been submitted to confirm these facts.

1.4 Registration as a medical scientist will only be possible if a person holds a valid registration as an intern medical scientist.

1.5 Foreign applicants applying for registration must also submit official documentary evidence of meeting academic requirements or the academic requirements and the internship training in the category of medical science in which registration is required. Foreign applicants may be required to complete an internship or part thereof in South Africa in order to familiarise themselves with local circumstances.

2. **ACADEMIC PREREQUISITES FOR INTERNSHIPS IN MEDICAL SCIENCE**

2.1 The minimum academic requirements are:

2.1.1 four years full-time formal education (BSc(honours) degree in the case of MW or PH, or equivalent (as determined by SAQA and in line with the recommendations of the SGB)

2.1.2 four years full-time formal education (BSc(honours)) and registration for an accredited MSc(Genetic Counselling) in the case of GR. Application for intern registration should be made in the first year of study and the intern will receive 12 months credit for two years of study towards an MSc in Genetic Counselling. One year full-time internship must follow the attainment of the academic qualification.

2.2 In circumstances where academic studies are not as outlined in 2.1 above but are believed to be equivalent to the above formal requirements, an applicant may submit details to the Committee for Medical Science for consideration.

2.2.1 Certified documentation is always required and should be submitted with the application.

2.2.2 Applicants should note that qualifications obtained at foreign academic institutions, which frequently offer different curricula, are difficult for the Committee for Medical Science to evaluate and that, therefore, as much detail as possible of the exact course(s) for the year(s) in which the applicant studied at the foreign institution and as much further detail as possible should be submitted with the application. A SAQA equivalence evaluation may be requested.

2.2.3 If such an application is turned down, it is not advisable to apply to the Committee for Medical Science again **UNLESS ENTIRELY NEW INFORMATION** becomes available and is of such a nature which is likely to make a substantial difference to the view in which the original application was considered by the Committee for Medical Science.
2.2.4 If such an application is accepted by the Committee for Medical Science, it is the responsibility of the applicant to secure placement in an internship training programme in the relevant category (see below).

3. INTERNSHIPS

3.1 REGISTRATION

3.1.1 Before commencing the internship the candidate is OBLIGED TO REGISTER with the Committee for Medical Science as an intern medical scientist. Where already accredited internship placements are involved and the academic prerequisites are not in doubt, a grace period of TWO months is allowed for submitting the application and documentation for registration.

3.1.2 When the registration fee is rendered, the exact date of commencing the internship must be clearly stated. It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that the payment for registration is received by the HPCSA. Late registration and non-payment of registration fees will lead to disciplinary procedures.

3.1.3 All applications for internships must be accompanied by the following documents:

a) A written undertaking from the supervising medical scientist or medical specialist, registered with the Council in the relevant category, stating that he/she is willing to act as supervisor for the intern and stating the period of internship involved;

b) A written undertaking from the Head of the training facility accredited for internship training indicating that the intern will be accommodated for the full duration of the internship arranged as well as the exact period of the internship;

c) A written undertaking from the Head of Department and the Head of the supervising University, stating that the University concerned will act as collaborating University in association with the internship setting, that the Department will ensure that the training is undertaken in accordance with the approved internship programme and the dates of the internship. In order to act as collaborating University the University must offer a recognised honours degree (or MSc degree in the case of Genetic Counsellors) in the applicable category and the laboratory/division responsible for internship training should be accredited for this purpose. It is the joint responsibility of the supervising medical scientist or medical specialist and the Head of Department of the University to ensure that progress reports on the intern are written at least every 6 months during the internship period and kept for later reference;

d) It is recommended that a contract be drawn up between the intern and the training institution to confirm the above undertakings.

3.1.5 The requirements to act as supervising medical scientist or medical specialist are a recognised qualification in medical science in a relevant category or recognised specialist qualification in an appropriate field and registration with the HPCSA plus three years experience;

and

Appropriate training and/or experience in supervision.
3.1.6 In cases where the internship is completed at more than one training institution, the duration of each placement should be clearly stated.

3.2 TIMING OF INTERNSHIP

3.2.1 The internship on a full-time basis may only commence AFTER completing the prerequisite formal academic requirements; internship time which predates the formal academic requirements WILL, therefore, NOT BE recognised as part of the internship.

3.2.2 An internship MUST commence within two years of completing the final year of a degree in medical science (or equivalent) qualification. In exceptional circumstances the Committee for Medical Science may allow an extension, provided the university concerned supports the application in writing and the Committee for Medical Science finds the motivation acceptable.

3.2.4 A medical scientist who has been registered in the category Student for an MSc or PhD degree and who wishes to do intern training to register in the category Independent Practice, may be considered for a shortened internship period following the attainment of the qualification, at the discretion of the Committee for Medical Science, should it deem the activities during the student years pertinent and appropriate in preparation for intern training. A minimum of 6 months intern training and an assessment of competence will be required before registration in the category Independent Practice.

3.3 INTERNSHIP TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

3.3.1 The term internship refers to the prescribed minimum period of 24 months of full time practical training (within which no more than 4 weeks may be taken as leave or as sick leave per annum) OR a shortened internship at the discretion of the committee, in the case of applicants who have an appropriate MSc or PhD degree.

3.3.2 An internship comprises full time employment as an intern medical scientist at an approved institution accredited by the Committee for Medical Science following a stipulated programme of training.

3.3.3 Should an intern require sick leave or leave for any other reason in excess of the 4 weeks per annum permitted, the administration of the training requirements is the responsibility of the supervising medical scientist of the training institution, i.e. the period of internship must be extended in order to comply with the above requirements.

3.3.4 All requirements relating to the internship in medical science must be completed within a four-year period.

3.4 SPECIALLY TAILORED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES

3.4.1 Specially tailored internship programmes must be compiled by the supervising medical scientist or medical specialist in situ at the various sites where the training is to proceed. Training is only allowed at facilities accredited for this purpose by the Committee for Medical Science. Full details of the tailored programme will be a prerequisite for the intern training and must approved BEFORE the internship is commenced, giving the dates of proposed commencement and completion.
3.4.2 The application must be submitted by the candidate together with written undertakings from each of the supervising medical scientists or medical specialists who will be providing *in situ* supervision, each of whom will stipulate approval of the proposed programme of training and confirm the dates of commencement and completion of training.

3.4.3 The following information must be submitted with the application to the Committee for Medical Science for approval of the tailored internship: details of the programme, the specific medical science tests used and/or skills which will be developed, techniques in which training is to be provided, and full time based details of individual and supervision arrangements which is to be provided, details of experience of team work with other professionals or colleagues is also important. The supervising medical scientist *must* provide his or her HPCSA registration number.

3.4.4 Supervising medical scientists or medical specialists *MUST* be registered in the same or appropriate professional category as the intern medical scientist.

3.5 COMPLETION OF INTERNSHIP

3.5.1 An internship must be completed within four years from date of first registration as an intern medical scientist.

3.5.2 Separate intern duty certificates (FORM 36) must be submitted to the Committee for Medical Science by the relevant supervising medical scientist or medical specialist for each training placement. These certificates should be handed to the intern by the supervising medical scientist or medical specialist for submission to the Committee for Medical Science together with the application for professional registration as a medical scientist.

3.5.3 Training facilities (or supervising medical scientists) are obliged to ensure that intern medical scientists are evaluated regularly, *at least every six months*, according to the criteria for intern training in the relevant category. The intern must be kept informed of his/her progress on the basis of this evaluation and copies of the progress reports *must be retained* to be made available to the Committee for Medical Science, if required.

3.5.4 Extension of internships: Internship training *MAY NOT* be extended beyond the 48 months training period without *PRIOR APPROVAL* of the Committee for Medical Science. An intern medical scientist may not perform any professional acts unless it is under appropriate supervision and it forms part of the formal internship period.

3.5.5 The intern will need to demonstrate successful completion of an examination or assessment of competence as determined by the board.

4. UNSATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE OF THE INTERN

4.1 In the event of unsatisfactory performance of an intern, a written report should be produced by the training institution and should be submitted to the Committee for Medical Science with recommendations for either –

a) the termination of the internship at a given date; or
b) the extension of the internship with clearly specified objectives; such an application for an extension to be submitted not later than following the third progress report or the 18th month of the internship, preferably earlier if possible.

4.2 Should an intern become mentally or physically incompetent to perform medical science acts as required professionally, the matter should be reported to the Health Committee of the Board. The Health Committee will investigate the circumstances and will provide guidance on the treatment and rehabilitation of the intern medical scientist or deal with the matter as circumstances dictate.

5. TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF INTERNS

5.1 Supervision of interns requires that the supervising medical scientist or medical specialist or another appropriately qualified and registered person is accessible and available for personal contact on a day-to-day basis.

5.2 There are specific supervisory and training stipulations required for training in each registration category. The minimum training criteria stipulated by the Committee for Medical Science should be consulted for details.

5.3 The ratio of interns to each supervising medical scientist will be determine when the accreditation is done and will depend on the size of the training facility and the full-time or part-time involvement of the supervisors. In small facilities 1 intern to 1 supervisor would be appropriate and not more that 3 interns per supervisor in larger facilities.

5.4 If an intern medical scientist fails to comply with the requirements set by the Committee for Medical Science, or the training institution fails to deliver the training programme, such training will not be recognised by the Committee.

5.5 Professional Registration categories: An intern may receive training only under the supervision of a medical scientist or medical specialist who is registered in an appropriate professional category, and who is able to implement a programme which complies with the minimum requirements of training for that category. Any exception to this rule will not be permitted without prior approval of the Committee for Medical Science – a fully motivated application to the Committee for Medical Science should be submitted in advance, taking into account the delay which may be involved in processing the application.

5.6 A medical scientist or medical specialist supervising the internship of an intern medical scientist and who is NOT REGISTERED in an appropriate category or not fulfilling his/her supervisory obligations WILL BE LIABLE to disciplinary action.

5.7 An internship setting must provide SUITABLE and adequate exposure in the relevant category.

5.8 The registration number of the intern medical scientist must be reflected in all correspondence.

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