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## **DRAFT DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ADDRESSING ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF MEDICAL INTERNSHIP DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In 2020 South African public health system is hosting interns in their second year in the old programme and first year in the new programme in HPCSA accredited facilities.

The rotations were designed in such a way that the majority of second year interns should complete their rotations by the end of December 2020 and qualify for community service in January 2021. Similarly interns in first year should complete their 24-month programme at the end of December 2021 and proceed to community service in January 2022.

The COVID19 pandemic has posed specific challenges to the training programmes that will result in compromised training to individuals or groups of interns across our accredited facilities.

This may be due to scaling down of elective services in many hospitals in an effort to create designated beds and specific services for COVID care, as well as to reduce contact time with patients with a view to protect the health care professionals without compromising clinical care; reduced duration of shifts; and time off given to interns, trainers and supervisors to allow for recuperation.

In addition, interns being in the front line may lose valuable training time because of quarantine/isolation, should they come into contact with patients diagnosed with COVID19 without the appropriate PPE or because some of the interns may unfortunately become infected with COVID19. Interns must be supervised and supported by supervisors while on the frontline of covid related clinical activity.

It is also difficult to predict the full course of this pandemic and its full impact on the health system.

The Medical and Dental Professions Board thus proposes the following in this context

1. Rotation of interns in different domains must continue as planned. Allocation for covid related activities must not compromise their primary training needs in the domains
2. The HPCSA expects that appropriate PPE will be provided to front line health professionals including interns by the health authorities and interns must adhere to PPE requirements to protect themselves.
3. The HPCSA expects that quarantine and isolation protocols should be in place in facilities for interns as for any other health care professional.
4. The normal procedures for the assessment of competency requirements in each of the domains will be maintained.
5. With regard to the assessment of competency requirements supervisors should use their discretion to decide as to whether an individual intern has been able to master a competency without necessarily having been able to abide by the number of procedures prescribed in the logbook. This relates to the educational concept of "entrustable professional activities" (EPA) and as to whether a trainee can provide evidence of mastery of such an activity<sup>1</sup>.

6. To allow for possible absence from duty due to COVID19 related sickness, the principle of a minimum attendance of 80% in a domain will be acceptable for both first and second year interns provided that the required competencies for each domain are acquired in that time.
7. In case of prolonged absence from duty for first year interns in their three month domains, operational flexibility may be required for the completion of all required competencies; for example, it may be possible to use the six month family medicine domain in second year for this purpose thus allowing interns to move on to the ensuing domain in first year according to the rotation plan. However, if all the required competencies cannot be achieved within the 24 months, extension of internship will be required and the HPCSA must be notified. Please note that internship can be completed within a continuous period of 36 months from the date of commencement.

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<sup>i</sup> An Entrustable Professional Activity is a key task of a discipline (i.e. specialty or subspecialty) that an individual can be trusted to perform in a given health care context, once sufficient competence has been demonstrated. EPAs are a common approach to Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) around the world. (see attached document: ENTRUSTABLE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY (EPA) FAST FACTS

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