

## **GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING ACADEMIC CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID-19**

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PHYSIOTHERAPY, PODIATRY AND BIOKINETICS EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The purpose of this letter is to provide supportive guidance to Higher Education Institutions offering Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Biokinetics (PPB) training, on managing interrupted teaching and learning activities, especially for the final year students and Biokineticist Interns engaging in workplace-based learning and or clinical training.

The Professional Board for Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Biokinetics (PBPPB) supports explicitly, the processes and initiatives put in place by the South African Government in order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Because of the unplanned academic disruption for Registered Student Physiotherapists, Podiatrists and Biokineticist as well as registered Biokineticist Interns, the PBPPB noted that while theoretical teaching and learning may continue through alternative methods, students might not be able to meet the clinical / practical hours of their programmes.

The Heads of Institutions, training Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Biokinetics students are advised:

- a. that students are still expected to reach the program exit level outcomes in line with the requirements of the PBPPB, which includes that the students meet the minimum standard of clinical hours and that interns meet the recommended numbers of cases to be evaluated;
- b. to explore, while contact teaching is hampered, various alternative methods to enhance theoretical provisions;
- c. to prepare recovery plans to ensure clinical/practical teaching and learning is prioritised as soon as the academic programme can commence;
- d. that the recovery plans should be kept as reference records to demonstrate how the minimum competency outcomes have been achieved; and
- e. in the worst-case scenario where the academic year cannot recommence in 2020 or where the time available is insufficient to achieve minimum competency, the academic year may have to be extended into 2021 and that stakeholders for placement of Community Service Physiotherapists and practices for Biokinetics internships should be flexible to accommodate accordingly.

The Board for PPB hereby acknowledges the correspondence received from Prof D Maleka [9 April 2020], on behalf of HOD's from all the Physiotherapy training Institutions in which attention is drawn to some challenges arising due to the current pandemic. Several innovative activities are proposed, ranging from facilitated case discussion, journal clubs, online patient simulations or videos, online debating of ethical issues and designing audio and visual patient information materials and or health advocacy posters, as interim clinical related activities while students are

still in lock down. The Board supports these initiatives but recommends that no more than 10% (100hrs) be recognised as part of the 1000hrs for Physiotherapy, Podiatry and the 4-year Biokinetics programs and that these activities are aligned with the outcomes for clinical training. For the 3+1 Biokinetics programs, no more than 45 hrs may be utilised for these off-site clinical teaching & learning activities.

The PBPPB is aware that some institutions are having final year students return to campus to resume their clinical training. These students will be redeployed to clinical sites requiring additional assistance. Although our students may have to partake in activities that fall outside the realms of their student training, these hours will be considered part of the minimum hour requirements. This recommendation by the PBPPB however is made on the assumption that:

- the return to the health care platform is in line with the training institutions Teaching & Learning policy and 'COVID-19' guidelines;
- the minimum basic safety measures will be adhered to and self-protection equipment is available and that institutions have a withdrawal policy in place when these standards cannot be or can no longer be met; and
- students are appropriately trained and supervised when participating in support services that fall outside their current level of training.

Training institutions are advised to prepare contingency plans to ensure clinical training complies with all other requirements including exposure to multiple sites and pathologies or conditions, and demonstration of specific clinical/practical techniques as stipulated in the minimum standards of training.

The PPBB further advises programs to consult with their institution's centres for teaching and learning for further assistance in transitioning to an online platform and appropriately aligning their assessment strategies to ensure students reach the expected level of competency. All quality assurance practices including external moderation of all exit modules, still apply.

The HPCSA takes cognisance that registrations may be affected due to extensions of programs and will accommodate registrations accordingly. Please take note that the Professional Board is available should you need input or wish to engage in a discussion. We would also like to support the management and Registrars of Universities at any time.



**16/04/2020**

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