March 10, 2020

Joint Statement from ARC-PA and PAEA

Guidance for PA Programs on Coronavirus Planning

The Accreditation Review Commission for Education of the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA) and the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) are aware that many of our accredited PA programs are working to establish contingency plans in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Our goal is to work together to support programs by providing guidance on important considerations related to accreditation requirements, and, just as importantly, decisions about the health and safety of students, faculty, staff, and patients. Related to accreditation specifically, we have worked together to review several documents regarding the management of PA education programs in the United States and beyond and have determined the following:

- **Didactic coursework:** Each institution must make its own decisions about the best actions to take to ensure continued education for its students, while keeping in mind all local, state, and federal regulations and recommendations. While it is imperative that programs maintain compliance with the ARC-PA Standards of Accreditation, ARC-PA believes it is appropriate for PA programs to use the following technologies for delivery of coursework (even if these were not previously used by the program): e-lectures, streaming, and pre-recordings. If there are other teaching mechanisms that will allow students to continue to learn and meet the program’s learning outcomes, institutions and programs should utilize those during this time.

- **Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences (SCPEs):** During the clinical year, those students who are already engaged in SCPEs should follow the guidelines, from the clinical site or members of the assigned health care team, for care of patients with communicable diseases of all kinds. As stated in the AAMC letter dated March 5, 2020, entitled Medical Students and Patients with COVID-19: Education and Safety Considerations, “For COVID-19, we do not have these critical data about transmissibility, morbidity, and mortality, even as we need to make important decisions. Therefore, it may be advisable, in the interest of student safety, to limit student direct care of known or suspected cases of COVID-19 infection until better epidemiologic data are available. We suggest that, other
than limiting direct care of COVID-19 patients, clinical students continue their roles as part of the care team.” The ARC-PA agrees with this recommendation. Please note that Waiving SCPE hours is not acceptable and if necessary, graduation time may need to be extended.

- Conferences: Currently, unless there is a drastic change in the recommendations from the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) or the major airline carriers, there is no plan to cancel the following conferences:
  - Provisional Pathway Conference scheduled for April 23-24th in Atlanta, GA.
  - Clinical Post-graduate Provisional Conference, April 27-28th in Atlanta, GA.

If changes to the conference schedules are necessary, we will notify those registered for the conference as soon as possible.

We understand that there is much that currently remains unknown about COVID-19, as the situation is rather unique. Therefore, ARC-PA and PAEA encourage programs to contact the ARC-PA if their institutions anticipate significant changes in the program that may impact the structure, timing, duration, or location of the program. PAEA will also be monitoring the situation closely and providing resources as appropriate. We encourage programs to work closely with their medical and community leaders to find effective ways to manage the education of students while maintaining compliance with the ARC-PA Standards.

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