



Accreditation Review Commission on Education
for the Physician Assistant, Inc.

April 13, 2020

Statement from ARC-PA regarding COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic situation continues to dominate medical efforts in the United States. Medical providers are struggling across the country and there are notable deficits in numbers of health care workers in multiple states, especially in New York, California, and Washington.

The ARC-PA has had many email exchanges and understands that institutions and faculty members are working diligently to find ways to continue the education of their students during this difficult time. There have been some stellar education plans from programs submitted to the ARC-PA with innovative measures to progress students through the program, while assuring that program-defined competencies are met. Bravo! Faculty are making great strides in this way. The ARC-PA and PAEA will work collaboratively to continue to find alternative pathways to assure excellence in education while maintaining compliance with the standards.

Over the past weeks, there have been some frequently asked questions, so we'd like to address some of those that have come in the past few days.

Reporting to the ARC-PA

Q: What should we do with the SCPE portal now? Will our program be penalized in future accreditation reviews for changes made due to clinical experience shortages and decisions made to keep students safe?

- Due to safety reports that indicate a lack of proper personal protection equipment (PPE) for healthcare providers, including PA students, *the Commission strongly supports programs removing students from clinical sites until the assurance of proper PPE is available.*
- The SCPE portal should be regularly updated to reflect the program's current clinical situation. In times with a great amount of change, it may be more appropriate to make updates to the portal less frequently. The ARC-PA is placing a hold on programs having to complete SCPE portal upgrades for the next 90 days. The ARC-PA does not plan to penalize program for decisions made during the pandemic to keep students safe. If struggles exist beyond the pandemic, the program should openly address the matter with the ARC-PA.

Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences (SCPEs) and Student Progression

Some programs have made adjustments to their clinical rotations schedule and posed the following questions:

Q: How much can be done virtually, with simulation or other technology in this time of COVID-19? Can we use online or virtual rotations to meet SCPE requirements instead of direct patient care? What about telemedicine?

- The ARC-PA defines supervised clinical practice experiences (SCPEs) as: Supervised student encounters with patients that include comprehensive patient assessment and involvement in patient care decision making and which result in a detailed plan for patient management. Programs may use virtual experiences, simulation or other technology to meet some of the program defined learning outcomes for SCPEs, but the intention remains that SCPEs will include some direct patient care, meet the program defined learning outcomes, and be of sufficient breadth and depth to prepare students for the clinical practice of medicine.
- Telemedicine may be used to meet SCPE learning outcomes in some cases but has its limits. For example, a program may be able to use telemedicine to meet SCPE requirements for standards related to patients seeking pre-operative and post-operative care but may not be effective for meeting requirements related to patients seeking intra-operative care.

Q: Are PA programs permitted to change their grading policy secondary to the Covid-19 pandemic? Specifically, can we change from an A, B+, B, C+, C, F grading system to a P/F grading system?

- Programs are permitted to change the grading policy at any time with appropriate institution approval. The ARC-PA cautions programs looking to change the grading system to consider the following:
 - A pass/fail system will not allow for subsequent GPA reporting. This may impact students' financial aid or ability to qualify for scholarships,
 - Program progression strategies will have to align with the pass/fail system. For example, it may be difficult to require a 3.0 GPA for 'good standing' in a program that has moved to a pass/fail grading system.
 - Fair practices standards require programs to make readily available academic performance and progression information. Students must be informed of changes in grading and or progression policies.

ARC-PA's response

Q: What is the ARC-PA doing to help programs?

The ARC-PA has been monitoring the COVID-19 situation and is in constant communication with our cross-organization leadership colleagues (AAPA, NCCPA, and PAEA). We will continue to collaborate with PAEA to address issues related to PA education and COVID-19. We will continue to meet to determine potential solutions for assisting programs in understanding the accreditation standards and what flexibility the program may have in delivery of its educational components.

Q: Our institution plans to make changes to our matriculation date for the next cohort of students. Will we have to wait 6 months to receive ARC-PA approval for this?

Programs are submitting their plans for changes to the ARC-PA and those requests are being expedited. The average time for a response is 1-2 weeks. All change forms are found on the ARC-PA website. <http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/resources/program-change-forms/>

As always, the ARC-PA appreciates the dedication of programs to provide quality PA education. We extend our hope for your safety and wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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