



February 25, 2021

Statement from ARC-PA regarding COVID-19

As we begin to see changes in the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on PA education, the ARC-PA continues to engage in email exchanges with programs, institutions, and faculty members. Over the past weeks, there have been some frequently asked questions regarding vaccine protocols and requests for guidance from the ARC-PA. Here are the responses from ARC-PA to those questions:

Student Screenings related to COVID-19

Q: What should programs do regarding screening of students related to COVID-19?

Several questions have come to the ARC-PA concerning screenings that may be required of students to progress in the program and the faculty role in these screenings. Standard A3.09 (4th and 5th editions) states:

The program *must* define, publish, make *readily available* and consistently apply policies that preclude *principal* faculty, the program director and the *medical director* from participating as health care providers for students in the program, except in an emergency situation.

Some programs are asked to be involved in taking temperatures of students to allow the students' entrance into classrooms or onto campus. While the ARC-PA agrees that faculty members taking temperatures of students during a pandemic is a public health service and is not providing care, the Commission also agrees that it is the institution's responsibility to make the decision whether a student can participate in educational activities rather than that of faculty members or administrative staff. If the institution has a policy that eliminates any decision by the faculty member to determine a course of action based on a temperature reading or other data, (for instance, if the institution sets a policy such as 'any student or faculty with a temperature above 99.9°F must go home), that is not considered "providing care" and is acceptable and not in violation of Standard A3.09.

As for COVID-19 screening results, programs may receive information from student health centers or other entities about the student being 'cleared' or 'not cleared' based upon the results of a screening test. For those programs without student health services, the information may be filtered from any other vendor (including the student's primary care provider) that reviews the student's

health information. If a student tests positive for COVID-19, this is considered confidential health information that should **not** be made available to faculty members under Standard A3.19 (4th and 5th ed.):

Student *health records* are confidential and *must* not be accessible to or reviewed by *program, principal or instructional faculty* or staff except for immunization and screening results, which may be maintained and released with written permission from the student.

Also, in alignment with Standard A3.19, contact tracing following a positive COVID-19 result should be the responsibility of the institution or public health department and **not** that of PA faculty or administrative staff.

Students work with patients who have tested positive for COVID-19

Q: Are there any regulations within the ARC-PA standards that are against having PA students perform COVID swabs on symptomatic patients as part of a primary care rotation? Or is this acceptable practice for a 2nd year PA student?

In the early months of the pandemic, the ARC-PA provided guidance that confirmed support for programs that needed to remove students from clinical sites to secure their safety. At that time, PPE availability was sometimes limited for student use. Presently, students are beginning to be vaccinated and the expectations of some clinical sites is that students will participate in testing for COVID-19 in patients, or in the provision of care for those known to have the virus.

The short answer to the question above is no, the ARC-PA does not have standards that restrict students from performing testing as described above on symptomatic patients or providing care for patients with confirmed COVID-19. The ARC-PA does, however, expect that students have enough PPE and instruction (from clinical sites and/or PA programs) to remain safe while caring for patients of all types, including those with communicable diseases. The ARC-PA also expects that programs will assure that students are being taught to practice medicine safely during and beyond the current pandemic.

Students and COVID-19 vaccinations

Q: The advent of vaccines now available to front line health-care workers begs the question - what is the ARC-PA's guidance to PA programs as to administration's responsibilities to implement not only PPE but MOST IMPORTANTLY vaccine protocols for students now receiving front line assignments?

The ARC-PA Standards state:

A3.07 The program must define, publish, make readily available and consistently apply:

a) a policy on immunization and health screening of students. Such policy must be based on

then current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for health professionals and state specific mandates.

The ARC-PA expects institutions and programs to assure that there are applied policies that align with the requirements of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for health professionals as well as state specific (or clinical site) mandates to assure the students' safety on Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences (SCPEs), despite the presence of patients with communicable disease at the site.

We commend the programs who have worked diligently to ensure quality in the education delivered to students in the midst of the pandemic. We recognize your valor in finding innovative ways to engage students who were temporarily displaced from clinical sites. Your innovations and your refusal to step out of alignment with the standards of accreditation is notable. On behalf of the ARC-PA and the PA profession, we thank you for your continued dedication to quality in PA education and subsequent, quality to the PA profession.