

 DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF MEDICINE Clerkship Attendance & Absence Policy	Policy sponsor: Associate Dean, UGME	Approval date: October 22, 2015 <i>(Clerkship Short & Long Term Leave of Absence Protocol)</i>
	Responsible unit: Undergraduate Medical Education Office	Amendments: <i>November 2024</i> <i>March 3, 2026</i>

A. Background & Purpose

This protocol is intended for guidance on short and long-term leave of absence in the clerkship years (Med 3 – 5).

Short-Term Leave:

Short-term leave involves missing any part of the mandatory curriculum and does not affect the anticipated date for completion of the MD degree. It may be anticipated or unanticipated in nature.

Long-term Leave of Absence:

A leave of absence (LOA) is a prolonged absence from the curriculum, during which a student cannot reasonably participate in effective learning and is not considered to be working toward the MD degree. It implies that the student will not obtain the MD degree in the anticipated 4-year time frame.

B. Application

Compliance with this policy is required during all components and by all Clerkship students (Med 3, Med 4, and clerkship extension, Med 5) at all campuses.

C. Definitions

Clerkship: refers to students in the last 2 years of the undergraduate medical education program.

Clerkship Extension: refers to students who were unmatched in their Med 4 year and are undertaking a Med 5 year.

Clinical Rotation: refers to any clinical component of the undergraduate curriculum, which includes rural week, PIERs, core clerkship rotations, and med 4 and 5 electives.

PIER: Positioning, Integration, Evaluation, Research & Review.

Campus-specific Associate Dean: Refers to the Associate Dean with responsibility for the undergraduate program at the campus at which the student is registered.

Campus-specific Assistant Dean, Clerkship: Refers to the Assistant Dean with responsibility for the Clerkship program at the campus at which the student is registered.

Time away: for the purpose of this policy Time Away from clinical service will include approved short-term leave (academic and non-academic), statutory holidays, and unanticipated clinical service interruptions (E.g. weather, facility/operational issues). Post call days and attendance of rounds/academic half days will not be included in the calculation of Time Away from clinical service.

D. Policy

Short-Term Leave:

Short-term leave may be granted by the campus-specific Associate Dean or a delegated Assistant Dean, Clerkship for mandatory components of the curriculum as per the following:

- a. Unanticipated short-term leave. Examples include:
 - i. Illness or injury
 - ii. Care of an immediate family member or bereavement

- b. Anticipated short-term leave may be granted by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean or a delegated Assistant Dean, Clerkship for mandatory components of the curriculum (with the exception of OSCEs and summative written exams). Examples include:
 - i. Research work accepted at an educational conference or scientific meeting.
 - ii. Selected as a representative for Dalhousie University, province or Canada for an extracurricular activity, such as a sporting event.
 - iii. Selected as a representative by a Faculty of Medicine department or affiliated organization for an education conference or scientific meeting.
 - iv. To attend an event, such as a wedding, family reunion, or culturally significant event. See UGME guideline for more information on Time-Off for Culturally Significant Events on the [UGME policy page](#).
 - v. Other activities deemed appropriate by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean and Assistant-Dean, Clerkship and faculty member(s) involved.

- c. Medical students must assume responsibility for meeting the objectives of the curriculum. All Clerkship activities related to clinical care are mandatory. Leave is not generally granted during any of the PIERs, as there are numerous skills taught which are vital for Clerkship, and many of the activities rely on small-group learning. Leave is not granted during rotations that are two weeks in length. Students will not typically be granted leave during periods of orientation to specific disciplines.
- d. Small group learning sessions, such as clinical seminars, are mandatory, as they depend on participation and interaction by students.
- e. Statutory holidays and weekends are not automatically granted as time-off during Clerkship; Clerkship students are expected to participate in regular and on-call duties on these days, and any absences over these days need to be requested as per this policy.

- f. Various factors may be taken into consideration when deciding whether short-term leave may be approved, and may include the reason for the leave, the ability of the student to ensure that any missed curriculum is adequately made up, the length of leave requested, prior periods of leave requested and/or approved, and the student's academic record.
- g. Med 4 and Clerkship Extension (Med 5) students are expected to schedule their electives around their vacation/personal time. If students require time off during electives, they must negotiate this with their electives preceptor and notify the UGME Office by submitting a Clerkship Absence form.

Leave of Absence (LOA):

A student may, at any time, consult with Student Affairs and the Assistant Dean Clerkship, depending on year of study, for guidance as it relates to absence from a component of the UGME program.

If applicable, students considering a LOA should also contact their financial lenders directly to determine the financial impact a LOA may have on current loans and interest free programs.

A request for a LOA is not automatically approved and may be declined or modified by the Faculty of Medicine based on the circumstances and conditions of the request. A LOA request will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs in consultation with the Campus-Specific Associate Dean in circumstances involving:

- a. Academic or education leave
- b. Parental leave
- c. Medical illness or injury
- d. Provision of care for an immediate family member
- e. Bereavement leave
- f. Other crisis or personal circumstance affecting the student's ability to attend to their educational commitment
- g. Extraordinary opportunity for personal growth and or achievement

A LOA may be granted by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean for up to one year, with the possibility of extension under exceptional circumstances. The Campus-Specific Associate Dean may impose a limitation on the number of LOAs as well as their total duration. Regardless of the number of LOAs approved and taken, a student must complete the MD program within seven years of its commencement.

A LOA may require the student to defer the full affected block/unit/rotation to a later period in their medical education and may involve a delay in graduation. In the event that the educational content of a course/Clerkship cannot be made up prior to course end-date due to an approved LOA, the student will receive a grade of incomplete until the coursework is completed.

An approved LOA, prepared by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean, shall set out the procedures and conditions required to facilitate the student's return to the MD program after the leave. For students in academic difficulty at the time of the granted leave, the procedures and conditions required to facilitate

the student's return will be determined in consultation with the Progress Committee. This will include a plan for the student's reintegration, including:

- a. the level of study at which the student is expected to return.
- b. how missed components of the curriculum may be made up.
- c. meetings with key academic leaders.
- d. a remediation plan, if applicable.
- e. a description of documentation required to support the student's wellness and ability to return to studies (including any restrictions or accommodations) if applicable.
- f. formative Clerkship rotations and/or written/OSCE examinations may also be required.

A student's course of study which is interrupted due to an approved LOA will be reflected on their Medical Student Performance Report (MSPR). During a LOA, the student is not permitted to maintain study and/or research work pertaining to the progress of their MD degree.

In consultation with the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, an approved LOA due to medical illness or injury may contain conditions such as:

- i. The affected student received appropriate care and support.
- ii. A written medical certificate or declaration of readiness to return to the MD program from the health care provider involved in the student's care.
- iii. An additional, independent medical opinion to ensure the student's capability to resume their studies.

Where an LOA involves conditions which may impact patient safety or is related to addiction, the Faculty of Medicine shall notify the relevant provincial Medical Regulatory Authority of the LOA, such that the College may take whatever action it deems necessary, including suspension of the student's registration with the College.

Minimum Attendance:

Students must be exposed to adequate clinical experiences such that curriculum objectives can be achieved and informed assessment and feedback can occur. Minimum attendance requirement is further informed by principles of professionalism expected from all undergraduate students.

Minimum attendance applies to clinical experiences but does not apply to mandatory components of the Clerkship curriculum such as exams, PIER 1/2/3 and mandatory components of PIER 4 including tutorials, boot camp, simulation, ACLS, or small group sessions.

It is expected that students will attend 100% of mandatory curriculum activities unless there are specific circumstances requiring time away. Time Away from a clinical service may include approved short-term

leave, holidays, and unanticipated clinical service interruptions.

Students not meeting the minimal attendance requirement for a clinical rotation will require additional clinical time such that meaningful observation and assessment can occur. The length and timing of this will be determined by the Clerkship/LIC director or Unit Head and Campus-Specific Assistant Dean, Clerkship. The office of Student Affairs is available to assist with personal or medical concerns that may be impacting student attendance.

The minimal attendance for a clinical rotation is as follows:

- For rotation rotations of 1-2 weeks, minimal attendance is 80% (meaning a student may miss one day/week without a requirement for additional clinical time).
- For a rotation of 3 weeks or greater, minimal attendance is 75%.
 - a. This will be calculated based upon the number of anticipated service days available during the rotation:
 - 3-week rotation = maximum 3 days away
 - 4-week rotation = maximum 5 days away
 - b. This will apply to students completing a Longitudinal Integrated style Clerkship, in which case a student missing 25% or more of required clinical experiences over a period of 4 weeks or greater may require additional clinical time.
 - c. For the purposes of calculating attendance, total days attended will include time on call including weekends and statutory holidays (note these will not be discounted from total days worked during a rotation).

There will be circumstances in which a student has made reasonable attempts to ensure adequate clinical exposure and falls just short of the above requirements due to unanticipated events (storm closure etc.). In this circumstance and in the case of other unforeseen exceptional circumstances the requirement for additional clinical time will be addressed on a case-by-case basis with the Clerkship/LIC director or Unit Head and Campus-Specific Assistant Dean, Clerkship, taking into account factors influencing the absence and the overall progress of the student during their Clerkship.

Absent without Notice:

A learner who is absent and has not contacted the appropriate offices (UGME and / or Student Affairs), and/or completed the necessary forms for a period of **three days or more or is absent for a significant mandatory session, such as an exam**, will be considered absent without notice. Of utmost concern would be learner wellbeing and safety if there are consecutive, unexcused absences.

In the event of a concern for learner wellbeing, the Campus-Specific Student Affairs team will reach out to the student using contact information on file and may, when necessary, reach out to the learner's

emergency contact. If no communication is received within 24 hours or sooner depending on the context, and in consultation with the Campus Specific Associate Dean, the Student Affairs team may arrange for a wellness check - this may include mental health crisis services/police depending on context and services available.

A learner who is absent without notice may be considered in breach of their professional obligations.

Depending on context and in accordance with the *Progress, Promotion and Appeal Regulations*, there may be a need for professionalism remediation at the discretion of UGME.

E. Administrative Structure

1. Authority: This Policy is sponsored by and falls under the authority of the campus-specific Associate Deans UGME.
2. Undergraduate Medical Education is the unit responsible for the administration of this Policy.
3. Student Affairs assists in promotion of the Policy.
4. This Policy will be reviewed in accordance with Dalhousie's Policy on Policies or earlier if deemed necessary by the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

F. Procedures

Procedure for requesting short-term leave:

1. Students apply for short-term leave by completing a Clerkship Absence form at least six weeks in advance (except in emergency situations). After approval by UGME, the request will be forwarded to the relevant clinical department for approval. Following decisions from both UGME and the clinical department, UGME notifies the student of the outcome. NOTE: Approval by both UGME and the Clinical Department is required; approval by one does not imply approval by the other.
2. Clerkship students who take short-term leave MUST ensure that all relevant faculty members and clinical administrative staff, including tutors, attending physicians and preceptors are notified of their absence as far in advance as possible.
3. Short-term leave during exams will only be granted under exceptional circumstances such as personal/health reasons or presenting research at a conference. If short-term leave during an exam has been approved, students must also follow the procedure for submitting an exam deferral request form. Exam deferral requests that are for approved conference leave must be approved by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean. Deferred exams are to be written on the approved deferral date. In some circumstances, it may be possible while on conference leave for example, for an exam to be written off campus/virtually at the regularly scheduled class exam time at the discretion of UGME, but it must be written at the same time as it is being written by the other students. Exam deferral for personal/health reasons must first be supported by the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean of Student Affairs or Director and be approved by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean.

4. For absence due to illness, Clerkship students must notify the clinical department (or as instructed in Unit orientation) to ensure that responsibilities are transferred to others and complete the Clerkship Absence Form no less than 1 hour in advance of the beginning of your clinical experience to notify UGME. Leaving a message with the hospital switchboard, ward clerk or fellow clinical clerks is not considered adequate notification. If a student has an extended absence of more than three days, a medical note or Student Affairs support is necessary.

Procedures for requesting a long-term leave of absence (LOA):

1. All requests for a long-term LOA must be submitted in writing to the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean/Director of Student Affairs. If supported by Student Affairs they will forward the request to the campus-specific Associate Dean, UGME. The following details must be included in the LOA request:
 - a. An explanation of the reason for the leave. If the leave is for medical reasons, medical documentation may be required to verify the nature of the illness or injury, that medical care is being received and the anticipated duration of the LOA. If the duration of the LOA is uncertain, additional documentation by the treating health care provider will be required. Confidential medical documentation is submitted to Student Affairs by the student and is not shared with UGME.
 - b. All relevant supporting documentation.
 - c. The proposed commencement date of the LOA.
 - d. The expected date of return to training. If this is not known at the time the leave is being arranged, a subsequent letter must be provided with these details.

Failure to provide clear and cogent reasoning will result in delays in having requests for LOA considered.

2. The decision to support a long-term LOA is at the discretion of the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean, Student Affairs and is approved by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean. Any request for a LOA is not automatically approved and may be declined or modified.
3. If the LOA is approved by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean, the student must contact all relevant faculty members, including any current tutors and preceptors who will be affected by the absence, except in case of emergency in which case UGME may assist in such notifications on behalf of the student.
4. The Progress Committee must be made aware of all long-term LOAs in order that they may provide guidance on the academic sustainability for a request for LOA. The Progress Committee may provide clarification on the criteria and conditions to be enacted in support of LOA requests. Prior to resumption of studies, the student will apply to the Progress Committee to allow a decision to be made regarding whether any specific steps need to be taken before the student resumes studies.

A minimum of six (6) weeks prior to returning to the MD program, the student shall arrange to meet with the Campus-Specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs, and Campus-Specific Associate Dean, UGME to ensure the student is adequately prepared to resume their studies, based on the procedures

and conditions set out in the approved LOA. A student returning from a LOA for medical reasons will be required to provide appropriate documentation to the Campus-specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs from their treating physician/health care professional of their readiness to resume studies and any accommodations to training, if applicable. Additional requirements established by the student's health care provider(s), Student Accessibility Centre's accommodation plans, the relevant provincial Medical Regulatory Authority, and/or other relevant person may also need to be met prior to the student's return to the MD program.