

 <b>DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY</b> FACULTY OF MEDICINE  <b>Short and Long-Term Leave of Absence Policy</b>	<b>Policy sponsor:</b> Associate Dean, UGME	<b>Approval date:</b> <b>October 22 2015</b> <i>(Clerkship Short &amp; Long Term Leave of Absence Protocol)</i>
	<b>Responsible unit:</b> Undergraduate Medical Education Office	<b>Amendments:</b> <i>November 5 2024 – Inclusion of Pre-Clerkship</i>

### A. Background & Purpose

This protocol is intended for guidance on short and long-term leave of absence.

#### 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 4year time frame.

### B. Application

Compliance with this policy is required during all components and all students of Pre-Clerkship (Med 1, Med 2) and Clerkship (Med 3, Med 4, and Clerkship extension, Med 5) at all campuses.

### C. Definitions

Pre-Clerkship refers to students in the first two years of the undergraduate medical education program.

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.

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

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

### D. Policy

#### Short-Term Leave:

Short-term leave may be granted by the site-specific Associate Dean 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 site-specific Associate Dean for mandatory components of the curriculum (with the exception of OSCEs, PIERs, and Rural Week). 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 or family reunion.
  - v. Other activities deemed appropriate by the Associate Dean and faculty member(s) involved.
- c. Medical students must assume responsibility for meeting the objectives of the curriculum. All Pre-clerkship activities related to Skilled Clinician and 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 or not 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. It is expected that students will not be absent more than three days per academic year; taking more may prompt a request for meeting with the site-specific Associate Dean and/or site-specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs.
- h. Med 4 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):**

Any reference to the Associate Dean, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Office of UGME or Office of Student Affairs will be taken to mean the site-specific official or office, depending on the student's current location for administrative purposes.

A student may, at any time, consult with Student Affairs, the Pre-Clerkship Assistant Dean, the Assistant Dean Clerkship/Director, 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 site specific (NB or NS) Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs in consultation with the site-specific Associate Dean, UGME 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 site-specific Associate Dean for up to one year, with the possibility of extension under exceptional circumstances. The 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 site-specific Associate Dean, shall set out the procedures and conditions required to facilitate the student's return to the UGME 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 remedial plan, if applicable, and
- e. a description of documentation required to support the student's wellness and ability to return to studies (including any restrictions of 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 a 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 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 UGME 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 his/her 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.

#### **E. Administrative Structure**

1. Authority: This Policy is sponsored by and falls under the authority of the Associate Deans UGME.
2. Undergraduate Medical Education: Undergraduate Medical Education is the unit responsible for the administration of this Policy.
3. Student Affairs: Assists in promotion of the Policy
4. Policy Review: 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 off by completing either a Pre-Clerkship Absence online form or a Clerkship Absence form six weeks in advance (except in emergency situations). The Clerkship Absence form is emailed to [ugme@dal.ca](mailto:ugme@dal.ca) (Halifax-based) or [dmnb.leave@dal.ca](mailto:dmnb.leave@dal.ca) (DMNB-based students). UGME will confirm receipt of the application within 72 hours. After approval by UGME, for clerkship students, 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. Pre-clerkship and clerkship students who take short-term leave MUST ensure that all relevant faculty members, including tutors, attending physicians and preceptors are notified of their absence as far in advance as possible.

3. Short-term leave during a written or lab exam 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 to [ugme@dal.ca](mailto:ugme@dal.ca) as outlined below. Exam deferral requests that are for approved conference leave must be approved by the site-specific Associate Dean. For clerkship students, the site-specific Associate Dean will first request approval from the Clerkship Director . Deferred exams are to be written on the designated deferral date. In some circumstances, it may be possible while on conference leave for example, for an exam to be written off-site/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 Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and be approved by the site-specific Associate Dean.)
- 4 For absence due to illness, pre-clerkship students must contact the UGME office ([UGME@dal.ca](mailto:UGME@dal.ca) , DMNS, and [DMNB.leave@dal.ca](mailto:DMNB.leave@dal.ca), DMNB) and copy appropriate tutors/ preceptors, no less than one hour in advance of the sessions. If you will miss a CCCLR session, please also notify the staff at CCCLR (for Halifax) or [dmnb.leave@dal.ca](mailto:dmnb.leave@dal.ca) (for DMNB), no less than one hour in advance. One45 will have the details of your sessions (excluding electives preceptors). If a student has an extended absence of more than three days, a medical note OR Student Affairs support is necessary. Students who are deferring an exam must have Student Affairs support. If you miss Skilled Clinician sessions, please refer to the Skilled Clinician Student Manual & Portfolio for more information.
5. For absence due to illness, clerkship students must notify the attending physician (or as instructed in Unit orientation) and the UGME office ([ugme@dal.ca](mailto:ugme@dal.ca)) no less than one hour in advance of the start of clinical duty to ensure that responsibilities are transferred to others. Leaving a message with the hospital switchboard, ward clerk or fellow clinical clerks is not considered adequate notification. One45 will have the details of your sessions (excluding electives preceptors). If a student has an extended absence of more than three days, a medical note OR Student Affairs support is necessary. Students who are deferring an exam must have Student Affairs support.

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

1. All requests for LOA must be submitted in writing to the site-specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs who will forward the request to the site-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 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 kept only by Student Affairs 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 LOA is at the discretion of the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs and is approved by the Associate Dean, UGME. Any request for a LOA is not automatically approved and may be declined or modified.
- 3. If the LOA is approved by the site-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 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 four (4) weeks prior to returning to the UGME program, the student shall arrange to meet with the Student Affairs office. The student will meet with the site-specific Assistant Dean/Director, Student Affairs, site specific Associate Dean, UGME, and UGME Administrator to ensure the student is adequately prepared to resume his or her 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 office of Student Affairs from their treating physician/professional counselor 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 Counselling Services, Faculty Counselling Services, the relevant provincial Medical Regulatory Authority, or other relevant person may also need to be met prior to the student's return to the UGME program.