



## **PHYSICAL THERAPIST RESIDENCY AND FELLOWSHIP EDUCATION AND COVID-19**

March 26, 2020

The American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education met on Wednesday, March 24, to analyze survey results from programs, and published guidance of other specialized and professional accreditors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including CAPTE.

Like each of you, ABPTRFE is attempting to adapt quickly to changes required by the pandemic while providing the best information and affording each program the flexibility to respond based on individual needs and resources. ABPTRFE appreciates that there are unique circumstances for each program and for their individual participants. Since our education community cannot anticipate every situation in these rapidly changing times, ABPTRFE would have difficulty providing specific direction for individual circumstances in a broad way. This ABPTRFE guidance is meant to assist programs in their decision-making processes during this crisis by offering flexibility to institutions and by making adjustments to some required standards.

ABPTRFE trusts that programs will make the appropriate decisions for their programs and participants through this period of COVID-19 interruption, even if guidance is not explicitly stated. It is the collective responsibility of all to ensure public protection and participant success for graduating residents and fellows who demonstrate competence within the program's defined area and who have met the program's outcomes.

To meet those aims, ABPTRFE is providing this temporary guidance. **This temporary guidance will remain in place until the programs are informed that such guidance is no longer in effect.**

### **Program-Specific Legal Review**

A variety of scenarios resulting from COVID-19 may lead to a delay in the normal program completion time for participants, including participants being ill or quarantined, difficulty maintaining appropriate practice sites, and institutions temporarily closing. There are significant ethical and legal considerations around changes in participants' learning experiences. Decisions about requiring residents and fellows to participate in specific practice sites, extending time to graduation, and/or delaying the start of the program's next cohort are both programmatic and institutional. Programs are, therefore, encouraged to have all program changes reviewed by the institution's legal counsel.

### **Temporary Changes to Mode of Instruction for Delivery of Education Hours**

Each program must make its own decisions about the best actions to take to ensure continued education for its participants, while following all local, state, and federal regulations and recommendations. While it is imperative that programs maintain compliance with the ABPTRFE standards, ABPTRFE believes it is appropriate for residency and fellowship programs to use

online, remote, or virtual technologies for delivery of educational hours, even if those methods were not previously used by the program.

During this COVID-19 interruption it will not be necessary to submit a substantive change and receive ABPTRFE approval to use distance education. However, if a program determines that the use of distance education or other changes from the approved method of curriculum delivery will continue after the pandemic, the program will need to submit a substantive change to permanently adopt this method of instruction.

### **Required Practice Settings (Clinical Programs)**

ABPTRFE appreciates program attempts to meet minimum practice hour requirements within required practice settings outlined within the Description of Residency Practice/Description of Fellowship Practice for the program's area of practice. However, ABPTRFE has determined that if programs and/or participants are affected by COVID-19, **and only during this occurrence**, programs may waive the minimum hours within a required practice setting, provided the setting the participant is able to practice in, and the patient population within that setting, are consistent with the program's area of practice.

### **Practice Hours**

ABPTRFE has determined that when programs and/or participants are affected by COVID-19 and learners are at risk for not graduating due to lack of opportunity to attain the required practice hours, programs may temporarily waive up to 50% (750 hours for residency programs; 425 hours for fellowship programs) of the total practice hours, provided the participant has met the program outcomes.

### **Mentoring Hours**

ABPTRFE recognizes program attempts to maintain compliance with ABPTRFE Quality Standards for mentoring program participants. ABPTRFE also appreciates that programs are using new modes of mentoring. Programs are reminded to continue to comply with all local, state, and federal regulations when alternate modes of mentoring are provided.

ABPTRFE has determined that programs and/or participants that are affected by COVID-19 may temporarily waive up to 50 hours, of the total 150 hours, of 1:1 mentoring.

During this temporary period, a minimum of 65 hours of mentoring must be in person (1:1) for residency programs, and 50 hours of mentoring must be in person (1:1) for fellowship programs.

### **Faculty Evaluations**

ABPTRFE recognizes that completion of faculty evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic may be difficult due to impact on program operations. Therefore, during this pandemic, ABPTRFE is suspending the requirement for faculty evaluations, including the annual mentor observation evaluation.

### **Resources**

As programs plan and determine how best to respond to COVID-19, ABPTRFE encourages them to refer to these helpful resources:

- World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 page  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 page  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 page  
<https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature>
- American Physical Therapy Association Coronavirus Resources page  
<http://www.apta.org/Coronavirus/>
- Local public health authority for your county and state
- Local and state regulatory institutions
- Institutional accreditors

### **Contacts**

Please reach out to accreditation staff, preferably through email, with questions as well as to inquire about specific program issues not addressed within the guidance above.

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