

*Sent via email from the College on March 20, 2020*

Dear Colleagues,

We are receiving inquiries from department heads and program leads about human resource contingency planning that contemplate, for example, people working outside their recent training and experience. A contingency plan might include that in the event that all the members of the department are unavailable because of COVID-19 and there is no other alternative, that subspecialists in internal medicine be assigned to do general medicine call.

The College will not be a barrier to health authority decision-making regarding required human resources during true emergencies. We have all read in the news how acute care is being managed in hospitals that have been overwhelmed by COVID-19. I sincerely hope this is a contingency plan that never has to be implemented, but I can understand departments and programs wanting to be prepared for the “what if” scenarios. While the number of cases of COVID-19 is increasing, the number that are in acute care in ICU seems manageable just now. We appreciate that plans do need to be made for more severe circumstances.

I am proposing that for physicians who are privileged by your health authority (whether on the full register, the provisional register or the emergency register) who are deployed to a service at the request of the health authority, and their privileges have been changed to accommodate service provision because of the emergency, that they be waived of the College’s bylaw 2-2 (3). This bylaw states that a physician must practise within the scope of their training and recent experience. We don’t want to have physicians calling the College seeking assurances that they can do what they are being asked. We will be very clear however that this waiver does not apply to community-based physicians working in private practice.

We have received assurances from the Canadian Medical Protective Association that their members do not have to notify them prior to commencing a change in type of work. We encourage physicians to go to the CMPA website for further information regarding the CMPA and COVID-19 emergency.

Heidi M. Oetter, MD  
Registrar and CEO