April 7th, 2020

Dear UBC PharmSci PharmD Students,

I am writing to bring you some updates on where the Faculty and UBC are in their response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

These are clearly extraordinary times that are having, and will continue to have for the foreseeable future, a major impact on all of our lives. I fully appreciate that this situation is proving immensely challenging in many different ways for all of our students, staff and faculty, and I want you to know that the Faculty (and UBC) is wholly committed to supporting all members of our community to the full extent of our abilities over this critical period. I also appreciate that the pandemic situation creates particular difficulties for our students – adapting to online courses and assessments; uncertainty and concerns around fulfilling practicum requirements; financial difficulties; isolation and loneliness; concern for family and friends at home and abroad; mental and physical health challenges, and many other issues that I know you are facing every day.

As part of the Faculty’s response to this crisis, faculty and staff have been working tirelessly to try and minimize the disruption to students’ education, provide flexibility to practice educators/sites to assist students in meeting their practicum course requirements, whilst attempting to keep the program as “whole” as possible, and particularly to ensure that as many Y4 students as possible are able to graduate in the Spring 2020 cohort. I accept that none of these responses is perfect (although we are not in a situation where perfect is an option), but I do know that faculty and staff only have students’ best interests at heart.

Some of the main issues we have been focusing on for the past number of weeks include:

- Working to make the transition to online classes and assessments as smooth as possible
- Supporting students, where appropriate, with academic concessions and accommodations
- Working with community, health authority, and institutional partners to ensure practicums can be provided and completed wherever possible,
in order to meet the academic requirements of the program

- Working with those same partners to understand how students can positively contribute to the ongoing clinical needs of our communities during their practicums
- Making sure all our practice educators and practice sites are well supported during this time
- Connecting with CCAPP and the College of Pharmacists of BC to understand the implications of the pandemic situation for meeting accreditation standards and future licensing requirements
- Connecting with other Canadian Pharmacy Schools and other health sciences programs at UBC to share information and best practice
- Working with UBC to enable all Y4 students who meet their academic requirements to graduate in Spring 2020
- Actively moving all of our admissions process to an online format for E2P PharmD, Flex PharmD, and Bachelor of Pharmaceutical Sciences (BPSc).

In addition to these activities we have also been working in a number of other key areas that are not directly student-related, including:

- Supporting all faculty and staff in transitioning to working remotely, and supporting essential staff who need to be present in our building to ensure the safety and security of our space now and for the future
- Managing the curtailment of almost all research activity in our building, and working with UBC’s research leadership to understand and mitigate the impact of the current situation on critical research activity

I am also seeing the university’s co-ordinated response to the pandemic first-hand. All UBC Vancouver Deans meet each morning with the Provost and key members of his team and, on occasion, other members of the UBC Executive. In addition, the Associate Deans, Academic, Associate Deans, Research, and Associate Deans, Graduate & Postdoctoral studies are meeting frequently with their counterparts throughout the university to understand the impact of the current situation on academic, research, and operational activities across all Faculties at UBC. The effect of the COVID-19 crisis on UBC’s students is always high up on the agenda at all these meetings, and I hope that you can take some comfort in the fact that there is an appreciation all through the senior levels of the University of the toll that this outbreak is taking on our students. Financial assistance programs are being put in place, and will continue to evolve over the coming days and weeks. You will have seen, I’m sure, a large amount of information coming out about COVID-19 that is gathered together on the university’s main website at https://covid19.ubc.ca and I recommend that you make use of the resources there.

As exam period and final practicums are now here, the burden of completing these in unfamiliar ways will undoubtedly affect many of you. For those that need to seek additional help, please do reach out to the Faculty’s Office of Student Services (pharmsci.ssreception@ubc.ca) or through the multiple resources currently offered by the university: https://students.ubc.ca/health/student-health-service. Finally, if you have ongoing questions or concerns, please do submit them through this Program link (also posted in your CANVAS HUB) XXXX. The Program team is reviewing these daily and consulting relevant faculty and staff members to post updates.
I have been truly humbled by the response of our community to the COVID-19 outbreak. A huge amount has been achieved in a very short space of time and in very difficult circumstances. Of course, there remains much to do and arrangements for summer practicums and the next academic term are the major considerations for us over the coming weeks and months and we will continue to keep you informed about all of these issues. I am confident that everyone in our community will pull together to get us through this.

Please stay home, stay safe, stay connected, and stay well.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Coughtrie
Professor and Dean