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MEDIA RELEASE

FINAL-YEAR MED STUDENTS BENEFITING FROM REAL-LIFE COVID-19 LEARNINGS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DESPITE some disruption, medical students have benefited from witnessing the health systems approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and have demonstrated their commitment to health care and their chosen career, according to the authors of an article published today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

The authors, from the Flinders University College of Medicine and Public Health, and the Flinders Medical Student Society, wrote that they “remained committed to providing medical students with clinical placements”.

“Given the longer-term response to COVID-19 is unknown, removing students from clinical placements may not prepare them for their career in health care and may have significant implications for future workforce planning.

“There is heightened anxiety among the existing workforce who are understandably concerned about the rapidly changing impact of the virus. This can lead to differing opinions among clinical supervisors as to the merits of continuing clinical placements.

“At our university we have addressed this by writing and widely distributing clear guidelines for clinical placements in partnership with medical students and health care provider partners.

“In some high-risk placements such as endoscopy and other aerosol-generating procedures, we have encouraged the clinical supervisors and students to negotiate appropriate activities that do not increase the risk of COVID-19 exposure to either the student, other staff or the patients while still allowing the student to learn in the clinical environment.”

The authors wrote that the “real-life” learning of a clinical placement during the COVID-19 pandemic could prove “invaluable” for final-year medical students.

“To date, we have not had any students choose to withdraw from clinical placements,” they wrote.

“While they have concerns about their personal safety, they remain committed to both patient care and their own learning.

“Students have seen health system governance operationalised, witnessed senior clinicians act thoughtfully and with intent despite their own anxiety, and watched professional practice role modelled in the provision of good communication and a sense of humanity and compassion for sick patients.

“On-going evaluation of the actual educational experience that students are receiving will assist us in the provision of additional learning if deficits arise, and, in the worst scenario, help us to identify if clinical placements are no longer tenable.”

Clinical placements for medical students in the time of COVID-19 is available now at <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/clinical-placements-medical-students-time-covid-19> and is open access.

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