



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES
FACULTY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

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Changes at the Faculty of Medical Sciences due to COVID-19

Dear Staff and Students,

We are all adapting to the challenges presented by COVID-19. The Campus Principal, Professor Brian Copeland has been sharing a number of updates on the situation, respective to our Campus operations and I do hope that you have paid close attention to these. While these speak broadly to operations across the board, I wanted to take a moment to reach out and update you on the measures we are implementing specifically at the FMS.

First and foremost, I trust that you are following the guidance and public health messages from the Ministry of Health. Information regarding COVID-19 is being shared daily via all news outlets, and the Ministry of Health remains the authority.

This is a very challenging time for all of us, students and staff alike, but at The UWI - adaptation is a must! Over the years, we have recognized the need to move to online teaching. We have been doing this in small steps but, out of necessity and a commitment to continuance of the education of our students, we have made the full leap. It should be noted that, even as we transition fully to online teaching, we are ensuring that the quality in delivery and content remains at a high standard.

Here is what is happening at the FMS:

1. **Classes:** Online delivery began on Monday, March 23 and will continue in this mode going forward. We have the tools available and we are using them. During the one-week break, lecturers received additional training, where necessary, in the use of various tools to convert and deliver the curriculum content. That training is ongoing. We need you to exercise patience as

courses move online – there is a learning curve for some and as such there are likely to be some changes in schedules.

2. **Labs and Rotations:** The FMS curriculum presents unique challenges as we not only have laboratory-based sessions which require a physical lab, but we have clinical rotations that require face to face interaction with patients. We are examining how best we can deliver these while keeping students safe. You will be updated further as soon as I have more information.
3. **Examinations:** As previously communicated in the Campus Principal's update, final examinations have been postponed until further notice. Time is needed for us to work out the logistics of any form of delivery. However, in-course assessments including, assignments, mid-terms, and group work, will continue. Your programme coordinators are making the necessary adjustments for online delivery.
4. **Daily business:** I have formed a Faculty of Medical Sciences COVID Response Committee (FMS-CRC) to advise the Dean on all issues pertaining to this pandemic. All student bodies within the FMS are represented by their student leaders from the six major disciplines taught in the FMS (Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Optometry). ATS staff are similarly represented by an Administrative Assistant from each school. All Heads of Department and Directors who usually sit on the Faculty Executive are also members of FMS-CRC. We meet online once weekly on Monday mornings.
5. **Staffing:** Only critical services that require on-site work will be allowed at this time. Each department is working out a system to provide necessary coverage. Departmental and Faculty meetings will all be online. We are still open for business, but this is now primarily, online business.
6. **Communication:** It is important what you check the official channels of communication from The UWI. These include your UWI email as well as The UWI St. Augustine and FMS websites and social media pages. I want you to note this advice carefully.

The COVID-19 response remains fluid. For both staff and students, this is a major learning experience. But students, in particular, **this is public health and epidemiology in action**. Students from Years 1 through 5 as well as postgraduate students in all disciplines, you will see and be able to identify various elements of your training being played out.

Public health, epidemiology, statistics, and research have been playing a critical role in informing the clinical response. This shows the relationship of these disciplines with clinical practice. Next year, current Year 1 students will be expected to do research projects in this area as part your Year 2 research programme, and Year 5's may already have had some assessments that included COVID-19. It is in the interest of every student, in every school, to remain abreast of the literature... this is why you enrolled in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, this why you are here!

Though the situation is dire, perseverance through this turbulence and adaptability to a challenging and changing situation will see us through. We recognize that for some this is a stressful period. Ensure that you seek information from trusted sources, focus on facts, and **only share the facts**. Also, try not to spend excessive periods of time on social media or following the news – tune in for key updates and please follow the public health recommendations. You are already good at having online WhatsApp chats – how about setting up online study groups?

If you are feeling overwhelmed by COVID19 or all the changes, reach out to the **Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD)** for support and guidance. The information is available via your Student Portal and was also shared via email. They remain open to serve you all students.

The UWI has survived many challenges over the more than 70 years of our existence. This too we shall survive, and we will grow. This grave situation demonstrates the mettle of The UWI. Let us work together.

Stay safe and practice safe hands hygiene!

Regards,



Professor Terence Seemungal
Dean, FMS-STA
{Electronically signed}