



## Clinical Education and COVID-19

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic the landscape of clinical education in 2020 has been forced to evolve. In Missouri, medical schools across the state have transformed the way students perform clinical rotations or have suspended these services altogether. Many medical students are discouraged by this unprecedented time in our history. However, it should be noted that medical professionals are searching for alternative ways to educate medical students.

Hands-on learning can be a valuable educational tool. As we look to the future in terms of effective social distancing practices, small group interactions, simulations, and learning studios prove to be an adequate solution for certain learning objectives. For instance, A.T. Still University/Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine have their students doing some virtual rotations using technology such as telehealth and Zoom. At the University of Missouri School of Medicine, medical leaders are setting up telehealth services within the emergency department specific to the coronavirus so that patients can call in and ask questions and providers can ascertain whether the patient should seek treatment. This approach does not come without obstacles; it has forced our students to endure delayed graduations and professional hardships that will shape the rest of their career.

Steps are being taken to ensure the health and safety of medical professionals, visitors and patients. Screening at facilities, personal protective equipment and a calculated, phased reintegration of students entering the clinical rotation environment is essential. Missouri medical schools are also requiring their students to not be on rotations where they are at risk for contracting COVID-19.

Some pre-health professions students may be questioning if the medical field is right for them and instead, pursuing other paths. If anything, this pandemic should prove the need for medical professionals is critical, and the lessons learned will better prepare us for future pandemics.

Medical students on the threshold of their career have a front row seat to observe how the professionals in healthcare adapt and overcome these challenges. As the healthcare community moves forward and evolves in response to these challenges, students have been encouraged to engage with professors and onsite clinical coordinators for updates concerning reintegration and new protocols. As we move forward to navigate this uncharted territory it is important to understand one of our greatest strengths as Missourians is the ability to adapt, overcome, and support each other through challenging times.

*MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.*

### The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University-Kirksville
- University of Missouri-Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- East Central Missouri AHEC—St. Louis
- Mid-Missouri AHEC -Rolla
- Northeast Missouri AHEC--Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC-St. Joseph
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC-Springfield
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington