

Policy: Essential worker designation for students completing training placements

Scope

This policy applies to students from all professions who are completing training placements in any setting (eg DHB or non-DHB).

Definitions

Placement includes any placement in an environment that provides healthcare or related services to patients or the public and for the purposes of this policy also includes placements in non-health (eg educational or business) settings.

Essential services are defined and listed here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-essential-services-health-and-disability-system>

Student includes all students who have not yet graduated.

Policy statement

1. The first priority guiding all decisions is that all reasonable efforts must be made to ensure that students and patients are kept safe.
2. Students undertaking a placement as part of completing their academic programme are considered to be essential workers *if, and only if, they are carrying out an essential role or tasks in an essential service*. It is for the training institution and the placement provider to assess placements against this definition.
3. Simply participating in routine, ongoing training – even if based in a designated essential service – does not in itself make a student an essential worker. That is, they must also be carrying out an essential role or tasks as a part of their placement.
4. *Where a student is not an essential worker their placement must be discontinued until COVID-19 Level 4 restrictions have been lifted.*
5. Exceptions may be made where the student is able to work entirely from home and under appropriate supervision.
6. Students may decide that they do not want to practice during this time and should not be penalised for that decision. Students should realise, however, that an extended absence from their training programme may delay completion of their training.

Supervision

All students on placements must have appropriate supervision (as determined by the training institution and placement provider) to help mitigate the enhanced risks inherent in working in the COVID-19 environment.

It should be noted that supervisors must prioritise providing essential services over providing supervision. This may require that the student involved cease working with patients until appropriate supervision can be resumed.

Review

This policy will be reviewed and revised as necessary and in anticipation of New Zealand moving to lower COVID-19 alert levels.

Note

In order to minimise the spread of COVID-19, serious restrictions on workers and workplaces have been put in place under the Level 4 alert. Health services, operations, and staff are, however, expected to remain up and running. Employers must continue to meet their health and safety obligations.

These same restrictions and responsibilities apply to students and to those who are responsible for them.

The Ministry of Health is responsible for deciding whether specific activities in the Health sector qualify as essential services and, by extension, which workers are considered essential.

The Ministry recognises and acknowledges that other organisations also have authority and responsibilities in regard to students;

- Training institutions have the ultimate responsibility for their students' welfare.
- Placement providers determine whether or not they continue to provide placements to students in the current circumstances.
- Responsible authorities make decisions regarding registration (where required) and practising status (including conditions on scopes of practice).

Placements can therefore be discontinued (directly or indirectly) by these other organisations, even if a student is providing an essential service.

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