

COVID-19 Interview with Linda Csiza



Linda Csiza, PT, DSc – Lead Accreditation Specialist for Residency and Fellowship Education & Staff of the APTA – answered several frequently asked questions that the APTA and ABPTRFE have recently received regarding residency & fellowship education due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please email Linda at lindacsiza@apta.org if you have additional questions.

Be on the lookout for the RFESIG’s upcoming podcast as we speak to Linda and several other leaders in residency & fellowship education regarding resources and tips to assist you and your program in navigating this uncharted territory.

1. What is ABPTRFE’s guidance for residency and fellowship programs related to COVID-19?

Like each of you, ABPTRFE is attempting to adapt quickly to changes required by the pandemic while providing the best information and affording each program the flexibility to respond based on individual needs and resources. ABPTRFE appreciates that there are unique circumstances for each program and for their individual participants. Since our education community cannot anticipate every situation in these rapidly changing times, ABPTRFE would have difficulty providing specific direction for individual circumstances in a broad way. This ABPTRFE guidance is meant to assist programs in their decision-making processes during this crisis by offering flexibility to institutions and by making adjustments to some required standards.

ABPTRFE trusts that programs will make the appropriate decisions for their programs and participants through this period of COVID-19 interruption, even if guidance is not explicitly stated. It is the collective responsibility of all to ensure public protection and participant success for graduating residents and fellows who demonstrate competence within the program’s defined area and who have met the program’s outcomes.

To meet those aims, ABPTRFE is providing this temporary guidance. This temporary guidance will remain in place until the programs are informed that such guidance is no longer in effect.

Program-Specific Legal Review

A variety of scenarios resulting from COVID-19 may lead to a delay in the normal program completion time for participants, including participants being ill or quarantined, difficulty maintaining appropriate practice sites, and institutions temporarily closing. There are significant ethical and legal considerations around changes in participants’ learning experiences. Decisions about requiring residents and fellows to participate in specific practice sites, extending time to graduation, and/or delaying the start of the program’s next cohort are both programmatic and institutional. Programs are, therefore, encouraged to have all program changes reviewed by the institution’s legal counsel.

Temporary Changes to Mode of Instruction for Delivery of Education Hours

Each program must make its own decisions about the best actions to take to ensure continued education for its participants, while following all local, state, and federal regulations and recommendations. While it is imperative that programs maintain compliance with the ABPTRFE standards, ABPTRFE believes it is appropriate for residency and fellowship programs to use 2 online, remote, or virtual technologies for delivery of educational hours, even if those methods were not previously used by the program.

During this COVID-19 interruption it will not be necessary to submit a substantive change and receive ABPTRFE approval to use distance education. However, if a program determines that the use of distance education or other changes from the approved method of curriculum delivery will continue after the pandemic, the program will need to submit a substantive change to permanently adopt this method of instruction.

Required Practice Settings (Clinical Programs)

ABPTRFE appreciates program attempts to meet minimum practice hour requirements within required practice settings outlined within the Description of Residency Practice/Description of Fellowship Practice for the program's area of practice. However, ABPTRFE has determined that if programs and/or participants are affected by COVID-19, and only during this occurrence, programs may waive the minimum hours within a required practice setting, provided the setting the participant is able to practice in, and the patient population within that setting, are consistent with the program's area of practice.

Practice Hours

ABPTRFE has determined that when programs and/or participants are affected by COVID-19 and learners are at risk for not graduating due to lack of opportunity to attain the required practice hours, programs may temporarily waive up to 50% (750 hours for residency programs; 425 hours for fellowship programs) of the total practice hours, provided the participant has met the program outcomes.

Mentoring Hours

ABPTRFE recognizes program attempts to maintain compliance with ABPTRFE Quality Standards for mentoring program participants. ABPTRFE also appreciates that programs are using new modes of mentoring. Programs are reminded to continue to comply with all local, state, and federal regulations when alternate modes of mentoring are provided. ABPTRFE has determined that programs and/or participants that are affected by COVID-19 may temporarily waive up to 50 hours, of the total 150 hours, of 1:1 mentoring. During this temporary period, a minimum of 65 hours of mentoring must be in person (1:1) for residency programs, and 50 hours of mentoring must be in person (1:1) for fellowship programs.

Faculty Evaluations

ABPTRFE recognizes that completion of faculty evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic may be difficult due to impact on program operations. Therefore, during this pandemic, ABPTRFE is suspending the requirement for faculty evaluations, including the annual mentor observation evaluation.

Resources

As programs plan and determine how best to respond to COVID-19, ABPTRFE encourages them to refer to these helpful resources:

- World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 page
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 page •
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 page
<https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature>
- American Physical Therapy Association Coronavirus Resources page
<http://www.apta.org/Coronavirus/>
- Local public health authority for your county and state
- Local and state regulatory institutions
- Institutional accreditors Contacts Please reach out to accreditation staff, preferably

2. Is there anything we can do if our residents are not able to complete their required clinical practice site experiences?

For practice setting requirements (eg, venue coverage for sports residencies; outpatient rehabilitation for neurologic residencies; school-based settings for pediatric residencies), programs do not need to train in those sites if they are currently closed.

If residents/fellows are able to practice in other settings (as long as the settings/patients are appropriate for the program's area of practice), that is acceptable. However, ABPTRFE is waiving 50% of the required practice hours to accommodate for loss of practice time.

Current residents/fellows may have had some practice hours within these settings before the pandemic (and potentially may have access after the pandemic ends depending on their graduation date). However, in some cases, residents/fellows may miss the practice setting altogether if that rotation was scheduled during the pandemic. Therefore, ABPTRFE has removed program barriers related to specific practice site requirements during this pandemic.

3. What if my resident/fellow needs more time to complete even the modified program requirements, can I extend the residency program?

A program may extend the residency/fellowship program to allow the participant to successfully complete the program based on ABPTRFE's guidance. This may occur due to furlough of the resident during the pandemic or the resident may be designated to complete other activities not related to the residency program. The program director will report this action on their 2020 ACIR that will be completed in January of 2021.

4. Can I delay the start of my residency/fellowship program?

A program may delay the start of their residency program and this is not a substantive change. The program director should let me, Linda Csiza, know of the new start date and the new application deadline (if that also changes), so I can update the program profile in the AMS.

5. Can the program director put the program on “hold” for a year due to hiring freezes or any other activities from the sponsoring organization?

The residency or fellowship program may be put on hold and this is not a substantive change. This action will be reported on the 2020 ACIR completed in January of 2021.

6. Can the program decrease the number of participants they accept into the program for a year?

The program can decrease the number of participants they accept into the program for a year, this is not a substantive change. This change will be reported on the 2020 ACIR.

7. What is going to happen if my sponsoring organization won't allow outside people into the facility at the time of the scheduled residency/fellowship accreditation site visit or renewal of accreditation site visit?

ABPTRFE has created a virtual site visit policy for programs **that qualify** for this activity. The program needs to meet all requirements for the virtual site visit to occur, and if they don't an onsite visit will occur at a later time when this is acceptable to all parties. The process for the site visit remains the same, but all activities occur through virtual means.

8. Are program action decisions (accreditation, renewal of accreditation, substantive change, waivers, petitions for new areas of practice) delayed by ABPTRFE due to COVID-19?

ABPTRFE continues to meet according to their schedule of meetings posted on www.ABPTRFE.org. All decisions will continue to occur during the pandemic.

9. Can I add new faculty (mentors) to the program during the pandemic to meet the need of the program should current faculty be assigned to different job activities?

The program may add new faculty both mentors and educational faculty and this is not a substantive change. This activity will be reported on the 2020 ACIR.

10. Can I add new clinical practice sites to meet the needs of the residents?

Programs may add new clinical practice sites; however, this is a substantive change please see the Processes and Procedures documents for the details. If you need to add new clinical practice sites, please contact me and I will release the appropriate Substantive Change report form to you through the AMS. These additions need to be added proactively and 30 days prior to the next ABPTRFE meeting.