During the COVID-19 National Emergency new approaches to clinical education are being deployed across all healthcare learner environments. This is a time in our world that requires flexibility, and adaptation to the ever changing landscape of this Pandemic. The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) has recently given the UNM PT Division an update on how to deal with this fluid situation and still maintain accreditation standards.

CAPTE continues to uphold Standards and Required Elements 6L1 and 6L2 related to the curriculum plan. The plan is to include clinical experiences that encompass the management of patients and clients with diseases and conditions that represent those commonly seen in practice across the lifespan and the continuum of care, and in settings that represent those in which physical therapy is commonly practiced. CAPTE will not require students in the final year of the program to complete the outstanding weeks or hours typically expected by the program’s curriculum to meet its unique mission and vision under the following conditions:

1. Students met the required depth and breadth of placements required by their current policies.
2. Students achieved entry-level competence as measured by the program’s currently used assessment instrument(s).
3. Students completed at least a minimum of 28 full-time weeks for PT programs or 440 hours for PTA programs based on the CAPTE guidance document that was sent out on March 13, 2020, allowing the two-week/80-hour waiver. CAPTE guidance document, March 16, 2020

Given this information, the UNM DPT program will be reducing their total clinical education experience requirements from 36 weeks to 28 weeks of full time clinical experience and replacing the content with distance learning. By doing so, the DPT program reduces the footprint of non-essential clinical personnel in an already overloaded National clinical situation while guarantying on-time completion of the DPT curriculum for the class of 2020. Continuing to attempt to complete further clinical requirements places an undue burden to our National healthcare system and resources and creates the potential for delayed graduation of the class of 2020 as well as a trickle down delay to other PT cohorts at UNM.
The clinical experience curriculum for the class of 2020 is close to meeting all requirements, needing only one more week of full time clinical experience. The physical therapy program will track and help student’s complete this one week. With the ability to stagger student’s one week placement over the next month, at fewer and fewer clinical sites (as they cancel agreements), all clinical education requirements for all members of the class should be completed by the end of the spring semester. Once a student has met the necessary one week requirement, their remaining clinic time will be canceled and distance learning will commence. For the remainder of the semester, students will participate in additional learning in a virtual format, with programming, assessments and reflections in areas of practice related to the canceled clinical experience.

By changing the clinical education requirement, the University of New Mexico will be able to meet all accreditation requirements for the DPT class of 2020 allowing them to graduate on-time (May), sit for their National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) and apply for a license according to their original schedule.

Sincerely,

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