

UNSW MEDICINE: Prescribing Skills Assessment 2020

Statement of Support

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted UNSW Medicine's Year 6 medical students' clinical placements and their "normal" way of learning and our "normal" way of teaching. The rapid transition to online learning and teaching was quickly adopted by students and staff in lieu of face-to-face teaching.

The British Pharmacological Society (BPS) responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic and effectively developed a Prescribing Skills Assessment (PSA) exam that was suitable for remote sittings. BPS also provided students access to valuable resources including the "COVID resource - case studies in prescribing", 27 prescribing eLearning sessions to assist in student's studies during this period of social distancing, and two practice exam papers with questions tailored to the Australasian setting. These resources are accessible through the BPSA platform which is user-friendly for both students and invigilators. The PSA Exam integrates the Australian Medicines Handbook (AMH) resource, an evidence-based independent medicines reference preferred by thousands of clinicians in the Australian healthcare sector.

The BPS PSA Exam, a non-barrier, formative and mandatory assessment for final year UNSW medical students, was run for the fourth year since its first pilot in 2017. In previous years, the exams were completed in computer laboratories at Kensington or Rural Clinical School campuses. This year over 280 students successfully completed the PSA exam, conducted remotely, with students using their own devices at home or an alternative suitable venue. The remote delivery was successful and was the most suitable option to accommodate the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring student safety and minimising risk of exposure to COVID-19.

It was clear that under these conditions the University would be trusting the honesty of their students to participate fairly in the exam and follow an Honour code. It is an assessment which will help students determine how well they have understood the principles of prescribing and demonstrate their prescribing competency, a great opportunity to prepare for internship.

Remote Sitting

UNSW opposed to the use of online proctoring/invigilation for examinations due to students' privacy concerns. The students, Invigilator and Professional Staff instead joined the Microsoft Teams (Teams) call 30 minutes before the sitting was due to start, in order to read through the exam briefing and check that each candidate could access the PSA system and see the assessment event. The Invigilator communicated the exam password 5 minutes before the scheduled start time. The Invigilator, support staff and students remained online in the Teams call for the duration of the exam. Students were provided with a direct telephone number to UNSW Medicine IT-Invigilator for support with technical issues. The main issues were around logins, passwords and access to Teams call details otherwise the exam ran efficiently.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the team BPS Assessment Team and UNSW Medicine for enabling medical students to have the opportunity to sit the PSA exam remotely and safely during the COVID19 pandemic. This complex and demanding logistical operation at UNSW was even more challenging this year because of COVID-19 and would not have occurred but for the professional competence and dedication of the BPS Assessment Team and UNSW Medicine PSA Team.