

Important Notice about COVID-19

23rd March 2020

Kia ora koutou katoa

The Medical Sciences Council is aware of the enormous pressures New Zealand health providers are facing as part of New Zealand's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise the work being done by the medical laboratory science and anaesthetic technology professions to ensure they continue to provide the best possible care and services for patients and to protect the safety of the public during this very challenging time.

Protection of public health and safety is a core responsibility of the Council and in the context of COVID-19 this includes doing all we can to ensure practitioners can continue to provide health services.

The Council offers the following key messages to all medical laboratory science practitioners and anaesthetic technicians as we all work together to fight the war against the COVID-19 virus.

Self-Protection

You are undoubtedly experiencing unprecedented demands on your skills and time. While your first concern will be the care of your patients and people using laboratory services, it is important that you take all necessary measures to ensure your own safety.

Minimising your risk of exposure to COVID-19

Please ensure you follow the advice provided by the Ministry of Health <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-resources-health-professionals>, your employer, and your professional organisations in respect of distancing and placing physical barriers between you and your patients.

Medical laboratory science practitioners who are currently not practising

As demands increase for more COVID-19 testing, the Council is working with the Ministry of Health to assist with having contingency plans in place to ensure the medical laboratory science workforce is adequately resourced during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Expressions of interest are being sought from practitioners who have let their APC lapse and would like to return to work for a limited amount of time as part of the national strategic approach to managing COVID-19.

Expressions of interest can be lodged by completing the form at <https://tinyurl.com/covid19nz>
If you know anyone in this category, we would greatly appreciate you bringing this news item to their attention.

Renewal of your 2020-2021 APC

As you will be aware the APC renewal process is underway and many of you have already completed this. For those who have not yet submitted your application for your 2020-2021 APC, we strongly recommend you do so ASAP. Getting your application in before your current APC expires on 31st March 2020 will enable you to continue practising, as you will be deemed to hold a practising certificate.

It is important to note that **late applications** are not processed automatically and you would need to cease practising legally until your APC has been issued. We want to work with you to avoid that situation.

Recertification

You may have questions around the requirements of the recertification programme, and in particular meeting your continuing professional development (CPD) obligations. The Council recognises that in emergencies providing frontline health services takes precedence over attendance at education. The Council will take context and circumstances into consideration when considering an individual practitioner's engagement in the recertification (CPD) programme.

Justified variations in practice

During the pandemic you are expected to continue to apply the key values and principles as set out in the Council's Code of Ethics policy, including the need to work cooperatively with colleagues to keep people safe, to practise in line with the best available evidence, and to work within the limits of your competence. The Council recognises that in highly challenging circumstances you may be required to depart from established procedures in order to care/provide the best services for patients. If concerns are raised about your decisions and actions the Council will always take into account the factors relevant to the environment, resources, guidelines and protocols in place at the time.

The Council will continue to operate as usual during these challenging times and our staff team will be working remotely to ensure the ongoing provision of our core functions. We will endeavour to keep you up-to-date with relevant information (but not inundate you with duplicate information from other organisations).

Ngā mihi nui

Brett Besley / Mary Doyle

Chair / Chief Executive