

The Michener Institute of Education at UHN

• More than a school, Michener supports the healthcare system in troubled times

In a normal year in March, students graduating from The Michener Institute of Education at UHN's Respiratory Therapy (RT) program would be wrapping up their clinical placement and preparing for exams. But 2020 has been anything but normal.

In late March 2020, five weeks before the end of their clinical placement, RT students in their final year were accelerated to complete the program and get certified so they could enter the workforce immediately to care for patients with COVID-19.

A day after learning that she had graduated early, Michener grad Jaspreet Singh got a call from Toronto Western Hospital asking when she could start in the Intensive Care Unit. Hospitals needed RTs as quickly as possible to stay ahead of the COVID-19 surge, and new grads were already familiar with hospital policies and had completed most of their clinical rotations. Their skills and knowledge were as current as possible.

"It was exciting, but also surreal," says Jaspreet. "We went from ending clinical early to becoming a frontline worker within days."

Once Jaspreet started in the ICU, she worked alongside an experienced RT who showed her proper donning and doffing of personal protective equipment and other ways to protect herself and other patients. By the second day, Jaspreet was working independently, taking care of up to eight patients on her own.

Prior to the pandemic, Michener's full-time programs were a balance of in-class and lab teaching supported by a web platform for hosting essential course resources and enabling communication and collaboration between students and instructors. Changing and delivering curriculum in a new environment required considerable work, including determining how to change hands-on lab components to remote delivery, particularly for methodology and patient care courses that often depend on simulation. Each of

Michener's 10 full-time programs also needed support for web conferencing, content delivery and online assessment. Consideration for how to deliver exams in a new virtual format while also ensuring academic integrity and supporting students was also a priority.

Michener's faculty and its education support staff were able to address these challenges within a month and enable all students to complete their winter semester, while also designing a summer simulation semester that could be delivered almost exclusively online using microphones and webcams to practice interactions with patient actors and use interactive technology.

"The speed with which faculty and staff mobilized behind keeping students on track to graduate and enter the workforce still astonishes me," says Dr. Brian Hodges, Executive VP of Education at The Michener Institute of Education at UHN.

"When the province made the decision to close schools, our school took one day off to confer about how to transition to online, and then very quickly made it happen. Not only was there virtually no interruption to curriculum delivery, but those learners critical to the pandemic response were fast-tracked to graduation and certification and began working almost immediately."

Michener acted quickly to support Canada's healthcare system in other ways as well. Very early in the pandemic, the province asked Michener to develop a learning platform and materials to support healthcare providers who would be redeploying to care for COVID-19 patients. The school's continuing education team delivered this within 10 days - something that would normally take six months. Equally remarkable was how quickly the team adapted as the redeployment efforts shifted to long-term care. The platform - covidcarelearning.ca - continues to adapt almost daily, and has helped more than 8,000 healthcare professionals and members of Canada's military feel safe and prepared to work on the front lines of the pandemic.

As Ontario has entered Phase 3 of the pandemic, small numbers of students are returning to Michener's downtown Toronto campus for lab work, supported by physical distancing measures, new protocols and protective equipment. Lectures are being delivered online, and clinical placements in the province's hospitals and health facilities have resumed. Michener continues to deliver the most highly qualified healthcare professionals to the health system, even through a global health crisis.

"This couldn't have happened without our deep education design expertise, the passion and commitment of our faculty and staff, and our innate agility," says Dr. Hodges.

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