



November 2, 2020

Dear Students of the Faculty of Medicine,

I have decided to address you via an open letter, because the current epidemic situation makes communication between the Faculty Authorities and the wide representation of Students very difficult. My goal is to present an analysis of the current situation and proposals for changes in the course of classes in the current academic year.

After several months of distance learning in the summer semester 2019/2020, we all wanted to believe that in the academic year 2020/2021 we would be able to return to the previous teaching mode, which largely uses direct contact between students, academic teachers and patients treated in institutions providing medical services. Unfortunately, after two weeks of classes, it turned out that the epidemic situation was so serious that the Rector of the Medical University of Warsaw decided to suspend contact classes. I know that this decision is perceived differently. Some of you fully accept the premises that determined the introduction of serious limitations in the implementation of the practical aspect of teaching and appreciate the intention of this action, which was to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection. I would like to emphasize that the purpose of suspending contact classes was not only to reduce the number of infections that may occur during classes, but also infections related to the movement of students of the Faculty of Medicine (FoM) to classes and return to their place of residence. Conducting contact classes in practice means that several thousand students of our Faculty must travel every day by public transport, contact directly at the entrance to hospitals, in cloakrooms and, finally, during exercises. In view of the diffuse nature of infections, it is unlikely that such student activity would not increase the risk of infection transmission and, consequently, would not contribute to an increase in the number of new cases of the disease. Being aware of the limited resources of the health care system in Poland and the scarcity of hospital places where COVID-19 patients can be treated, accepting this situation would, in my opinion, be irresponsible and unethical. The employees of clinical departments of the Faculty of Medicine, who experience serious problems with ensuring appropriate hospitalization conditions for COVID-19 patients on a daily basis are well aware of this. At the same time, in many departments the number of teaching staff who could conduct contact classes with students has significantly decreased due to the need for quarantine and

isolation of infected employees. Moreover, the normal diagnostic and therapeutic activity of some units has been significantly limited due to the lack of medical and nursing personnel and the need to shift the burden of medical care to patients with SARS-Cov-2 infection. Considering that at the same time, i.e. in the third week of October, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of infected patients, the lack of measures to reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission could be considered at least incomprehensible, especially as the infrastructure of most clinical hospitals is not adapted to the current epidemic situation. I hope that the above explanation will help you to understand and accept the difficult decision made by the Rector of the Medical University of Warsaw to suspend contact classes.

The prognosis for the number of COVID-19 cases in the coming weeks is not optimistic. Therefore, it is hard to hope that it will be possible to fully return to the activities according to the originally prepared plan in the near future. In this situation, the Authorities of the Faculty of Medicine urgently developed several scenarios for further implementation of the classes in the winter semester 2020/2021. We took into account all the possibilities, ranging from passive duration in anticipation to resume the contact classes, to a complete reorganization of classes in both semesters with the implementation of seminar and lecture classes for the entire academic year in the winter semester and moving all exercises to the summer semester. Today I can say with full conviction that we have analyzed all possible concepts of modifying the timetable. Although I was an ardent supporter of introducing valiant changes, which would most likely make it possible to conduct a significant part of contact classes this academic year, at the moment I must admit that due to numerous limitations, including the real teaching capacity of the departments, some of the solutions analyzed cannot be applied. Additionally, serious difficulties in the implementation of didactic classes in the FoM result from the fact that, in recent days some departments of the FoM have been transformed into wards exclusively treating patients with COVID-19 and will have to be excluded from their teaching tasks. After many talks, including consultations with the Rector's Plenipotentiary for Education Programs and Student Representatives, in the coming days the Authorities of the Faculty will propose and present compromise proposals for overcoming this difficult situation. However, these proposals must be previously discussed and approved by the Program Councils. Meetings of these Councils will be organized in the coming days, the first one will be held on 2nd November. I have also planned a meeting of the Dean and Deputy Deans with Representatives of the Students' Government of the Faculty of Medicine, where we will discuss the proposed changes. We tried to include flexible solutions that would allow for the possibilities and preferences of both, the departments and

individual Students. I am fully aware that, in this difficult situation we are in, there is no solution that would satisfy all of you. I can assure you that we are ready to consider any proposals for modifying the timetable, that would enable improvement in the quality of education, in particular practical skills. However, I would like to ask all of us to measure the scale of the threat and problems associated with the COVID-19 epidemic.

DEAN
OF THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Professor Rafał Krenke, MD, PhD