



RECOMMENDATION: *That each pharmacy program in Canada explicitly afford students at least two days of bereavement leave (the hours of which do not have to be made up) in each experiential education rotation block, upon a family member’s passing, without cumbersome and potentially discriminating documentation requirements, such as death certificates.*

This statement is addressed to all administrators of pharmacy schools across Canada, especially those in leadership of experiential education programs. At recent national meetings of pharmacy student leaders from each of Canada’s ten pharmacy schools, the matter of bereavement policies and support was brought up. Students noted a marked, significant discrepancy between these policies across the country, leading to disparities in how pharmacy students are afforded space for their grief.

It has been well-documented that pharmacy curricula lack adequate learning about grief.¹ This reality often means students have difficulty processing death as they are on their practicums. While pharmacy schools are making progress on introducing these topics to students earlier on, we must also recognize that forming compassionate responses and processing challenging moments is frequently learned outside curricula, often from personal life experiences. Students that are afforded more time, and shown compassion to process their own grief, will grow into future pharmacists that can respond to their patients’ and patient’s families’ grief more profoundly.

The implementation of CAPSI’s recommendation is not limited to the benefit of today’s students and interns. Instead, this recommendation’s vision is to support a more compassionate pharmacy workforce for our communities in the future.

Table 1. Overview of bereavement leave policies for pharmacy students on experiential education

Sources include: student representative responses, practicum policy documents

<p>University of British Columbia</p>	<p>“The student may be granted bereavement leave from the practicum should there be a death in the student’s immediate family (e.g. a spouse, parent, child, grandparent or sibling). The course coordinator must be immediately notified. Absence due to bereavement must not exceed 3 days. This time does not need to be made up provided the objectives of the practicum are being met. If the objectives of the practicum are not being met, the practice educator, the student, and the OEE shall work out a schedule for making up the missed time. The Office of Student Services will be informed of absences and will advise if documentation is required” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
<p>University of Alberta</p>	<p>“In the case of the death of a family member, students should notify their preceptor and the course coordinator to determine a course of action. Time missed from the</p>

¹ Sikora, A., & Murray, B. (2022). Addressing Matters of Life and Death in the Pharmacy Curriculum. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 86(5), 8636. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8636>

	<p>placement site due to bereavement that exceeds 1 day needs to be made up.” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
University of Saskatchewan	<p>“In the event of the death of a family member, or family emergency, students should notify their preceptor and the EL Coordinator to determine a course of action. Where appropriate, a death certificate, funeral program, or related documentation, may be requested by the EL Coordinator within two (2) days of the return to the practice site. Students must arrange to make up the missed time with their preceptor.” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
University of Manitoba	<p>“Students are permitted two days of absences per rotation due to the circumstances listed below. This time does not need to be made up.” The circumstances listed include bereavement “in circumstances when a student is absent from the site due to the death of an immediate family member (parent, child, spouse, grandparent, or sibling)” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
University of Waterloo	<p>“Bereavement situations are managed on a case-by-case basis as each students’ situation will be unique. We work with you to determine the amount of time needed off and ensure there is a plan in place with you and the preceptor to make-up for the missed time away. The school may ask for a copy of the death notice or the obituary to support the absence.” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
University of Toronto	<p>“Students are permitted up to one day of absence per four- week (EPE) or five-week (APPE) rotation due to a medical or urgent/emergent circumstance.” [bolding added for emphasis] Students are able to petition for longer absences in cases of “death of an immediate family member (i.e., parent, child, spouse, grandparent or sibling).” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>
Université de Montréal	<p>“It's on a case-by-case basis. (Partner, mother, father, child, sister, brother: 5 days/year and for son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandparents, grandchild, father/mother/sibling of a partner: 1 day/year) The biggest factor taken in consideration is the percentage of the internship missed. For example, it's highly probable to make up the time missed for an internship shorter than 8 weeks, but it also varies depending on how many days were missed. A justificative proof is required.”</p>
Université Laval	<p>No mention of bereavement days. In fact, no policy for any absence during rotations could be found by local students. There is a requirement to complete 35 hours per week during rotation, within the dates that are assigned to students.</p>
Dalhousie University	<p>The PEP Policy Manual currently makes no mention of bereavement days. Therefore, it is unclear if these would be excused absences and be held to the following clause of the PEP: “Excused absences of greater than two days per rotation or a combination of excused absences and professional leave greater than two days per rotation must be made up.” A recent update to the PEP Manual now further outlines a few main categories related to absences, including: statutory holidays, medical illness, pandemic policies, storm days, professional leave, and PDW attendance. Therefore, more information on the policies surrounding this</p>

	would benefit affected students.
<u>Memorial University of Newfoundland</u>	<p>“Absences are permitted only in the case of illness, bereavement, or other acceptable cause (e.g., family emergency), duly authenticated in writing with supporting documents, except in the case of illness lasting less than five days.”</p> <p>“Normally, missed time is expected to be made up. The preceptor in consultation with the student (and PPE Coordinator, if asked) will determine a plan for the make-up of time missed to fulfill the requirements of the practice experience. Absences related to professional development (e.g., professional meetings) will not normally be required to be made up. These absences must be approved, prior to the activity, by both the preceptor and the PPE Coordinator.” [bolding added for emphasis]</p>

CAPSI recognizes that the discrepancies revealed above may be due to differences in overall practicum hours and structures at each pharmacy school; however, the onus should be upon pharmacy program administrators and the architects of these programs to create an experiential education program that allows space for at least minimal compassionate leave for students experiencing grief.

Many schools seem to work around these limitations “on a case-by-case basis”. CAPSI commends schools for realizing that any policies may require tailoring based on individual circumstances, but this cannot be a replacement for a minimal compassionate policy that would ensure consistency and transparency. The lack of any explicit bereavement leave policies altogether at some schools, such as Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dalhousie University, Université Laval, and the University of Waterloo, results in students having no predictable baseline for what can be expected in the tragic case that they lose a loved one during their rotations.

In a solely “case-by-case” model, bereavement leave may be afforded based on students’ individual abilities to self-advocate, their existing allies and privilege, their respective patterns of grief (which are well-documented to vary across the population), and one’s comfort with sharing their grief in endeavours to evoke the compassion they should have been granted from the very beginning.

There is also a potential for discrimination created by requirements for official death certificates, as meeting this threshold is more difficult for students who’s loved one passed for reasons they wish to maintain private. Deaths occurring outside Canada may also have more complex processes for death certificates. For these reasons, such policies favour students with family member death experiences that fit a normative set of assumptions.

Policies that only allow for one day of bereavement also do not recognize students who may have to travel for a loved one’s funeral. Such policies imply bereavement as a singular event. For example, if a student uses their bereavement leave for the day of a loved one’s passing, there are no additional days for them to use as leave for a funeral, memorial service, or other customs. Models like those at the University of British Columbia or University of Manitoba where 2-3 days do not have to be made up, provide for a more meaningful bereavement leave for students. However, we would like to note that even under such policies, there may be other cultural requirements for bereavement, including but not limited to Indigenous students.

“Those students requiring more than 2 days off due to distinction-based cultural bereavement practices should be similarly considered to encourage the retention of diverse backgrounds, including supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action to ensure representation of healthcare providers with Indigenous ancestry”

- Amy Lamb, CEO, Indigenous Pharmacy Professionals of Canada

Students returning to their rotations too quickly following a loss are bound to struggle extraordinarily when caring for others or concentrating on their tasks,² withdraw from routine activities, and distance from environments that may reintroduce trauma. This also limits the extent to which bereaving pharmacy students can achieve their highest quality of learning while providing adequate patient care, thereby obstructing the purpose of experiential education when students are not provided more time to be with their loved ones in times of loss. Finally, it should come as no surprise that students whose educational institutions provided compassionate, thoughtful, and empathetic bereavement policies were more likely to give back to their universities post-graduation.³ On behalf of CAPSI's over 4000 members, we plead with pharmacy schools to re-evaluate their current policies around bereavement leave and adopt the following recommendation for future pharmacists in training across the country.

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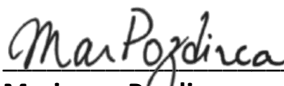
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² Cupit, I. N., Servaty-Seib, H. L., Tedrick Parikh, S., Walker, A. C., & Martin, R. (2016). College and the grieving student: A mixed-methods analysis. *Death studies, 40*(8), 494–506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2016.1181687>

³ Hamilton, L.A. (2008), Guidelines for death notification in college student populations. *New Directions for Student Services, 2008*: 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.268>