1. Introduction

In compliance with A Standards defined by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College), the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and the Collège des médecins du Québec (CMQ), the PME office is responsible for establishing policies and guidelines pertaining to postgraduate medical education. The section of the A Standards relevant to resident supervision includes:

A 3.9 The [faculty postgraduate medical education] committee must establish policies to ensure adequate supervision of residents in order to protect and preserve the best interests of the patient, the attending faculty staff member and the resident. Recognizing the principle of increasing professional responsibility in residency education, the faculty postgraduate medical education committee must ensure that there are adequate guidelines for the supervision of residents.
The components of resident supervision include:

3.9.1 A mechanism of disclosure of the fact that residents are involved in patient care, and for patient consent for such participation;
3.9.2 Assurance of progressive competence and responsibility of the resident for graded independent performance;
3.9.3 Policies for notification of, and discussion with the attending physician by the resident regarding decisions in patient care;
3.9.4 Policies regarding the physical presence of the attending physician during acts or procedures performed by the resident.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all PME students (residents, fellows, diplomates) overseen by the Office of Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME) in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (FoMD) at the University of Alberta.

3. Guiding Principles

“…each member of the team of doctors will be deemed to have separately undertaken the care of the patient. However, the attending physician as the leader of the team remains responsible throughout.” Kennedy, I and Grubb, A; Medical Law, 1994.

PME students require hands-on experience to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to independently deliver health care when they have completed their training.

Both the PME student and supervising faculty staff member owe a duty of care to the patient which includes the obligation to act in the patient’s best interests.

If the supervising faculty staff member inappropriately delegates a task or does not properly supervise the PME student in doing a task, the faculty staff member could be held liable for any harm caused by a PME student’s negligence.

The supervising faculty staff member is responsible for creating a learning environment which is safe for both PME students and for the patients assigned to their supervised care. This environment should be conductive to PME students acquiring the knowledge and skills set out in the objectives of training.

The supervising faculty staff member’s open and supportive communication and readiness to help the PME student are necessary to enable the PME student to voice concerns about a delegated task.

It is impracticable for a supervising faculty staff member to oversee every decision or action made by a PME student so tasks may be delegated where appropriate; however, supervising faculty staff members are responsible for ensuring that PME students are only given tasks within their competency.
The supervising faculty staff member needs to be aware that PME students may fail to recognize their limitations and take on more responsibility than is appropriate. PME students may have difficulty identifying and/or reporting their own limitations. It is the responsibility of the supervising faculty staff member to recognize when a PME student is unable to provide safe patient care because of the number and/or complexity of patients assigned or because of PME student stress or fatigue. In these circumstances the supervising faculty staff member must intervene to support the PME student and the patients’ whose care has been delegated to the PME student.

The supervising faculty staff members should create a learning environment that enables the PME student to meet the learning objectives of the rotation through delegation of both patients and procedures in a safe and practical manner.

The supervising faculty staff member must respond in an appropriate and timely manner to a PME student’s reasonable request for assistance in the care of their patients.

The Residency Program Director, assisted by the Residency Program Committee is responsible for the implementation and ongoing evaluation of compliance with this policy. Each program may develop program specific supervision policies supplementary to this policy. In any situation in which a program specific supervision policy conflicts with this policy, this policy shall prevail.

4. Responsibilities of the Supervising Faculty staff member

- The supervising faculty staff member must be aware of the learning objectives of the PME student for the duration of their supervisor-trainee relationship.
- The supervising faculty staff member must take into consideration a PME student’s skill and level of training when delegating a clinical task.
- The supervising faculty staff member must ensure that patients are informed of a PME student’s medical trainee status.
- The supervising faculty staff member must ensure that a PME student is competent in a given procedure before delegating that procedure. When a PME student has acquired sufficient skill and knowledge to independently perform a given procedure, the supervising faculty staff member must be readily available to intervene should it be necessary.
- The attending faculty staff members’ call schedule must be structured to provide PME students with continuous supervision, twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week.
- Supervising faculty staff members must be immediately available under circumstances in which urgent judgment by highly experienced faculty staff members are typically required, as determined by the Program Director assisted by the Residency Program Committee. Supervision may be provided from an off-site location in circumstances where the quality of supervision can be maintained and when required the supervising faculty staff member’s physical presence can be assured within a reasonable amount of time.
● The supervising faculty staff member must respond in a timely fashion when paged by the PME student and if necessary, the supervising faculty staff member must be available to return to the hospital in an emergency. When not immediately available to assist the resident, the supervising faculty staff member must inform the PME student and identify a supervising faculty staff member who will be available in their absence.

● The supervising faculty staff member must ensure that a PME student is aware of all the patients designated to them. The supervising faculty staff member must also determine that the PME student is capable of caring for all of these delegated patients. Moreover, the supervising faculty staff member must recognize the signs of fatigue in a PME student and intervene to ensure that the patients receive appropriate care while supporting the well-being of the PME student.

● The supervising faculty staff member must provide verbal and written feedback to a PME student. This feedback must be provided before the end of the rotation or hand-over to another supervisor. When possible, feedback should be provided in person followed by the timely submission of the necessary documentation.

● The supervising faculty staff member must confirm a PME student’s documentation of a patient’s admission, which includes the relevant history, clinical findings and the management plan. This should be performed within 24-hours of admission or sooner if a patient’s acuity warrants it.

● At least daily the PME student and the supervising faculty staff member will review the progress of all acutely ill patients, make the necessary modifications to the care plans and ensure that appropriate documentation is entered into the medical record.

● The supervising faculty staff member must provide PME students with support and direction in addressing conflict, discrimination and harassment in the learning environment.

● The supervising faculty staff member will ensure that PME students understand their roles and responsibilities during orientation at the beginning of each clinical rotation. The supervising faculty staff member must inform the PME student of what to do and who to call across the spectrum of clinical situations.

● The supervising faculty staff member must promote and model professional conduct at all times.

5. Responsibilities of the PME Student

● PME students must strive to be cognizant of the limits of their knowledge and clinical skills.

● PME students must exercise caution and consider their experience when providing clinical care.

● PME students must notify their supervisors of their perceived knowledge, skill and experience with delegated tasks. Residents must specifically state any concerns they have to their supervisor if they are asked to perform tasks outside of their abilities.

● PME students must keep their supervisor informed of their actions if these actions have the potential to harm the patient.
● PME students must inform patients of their status as medical trainees who are acting on the behalf of a specific, named supervising faculty staff member.
● PME students must provide appropriate timely supervision of more junior trainees rotating on the same service. In this role, PME students must assume the responsibilities of supervising faculty staff members as outlined above.
● PME students must inform their supervisor when a patient’s condition deteriorates, the diagnosis and/or management are in doubt or when a procedure with potential morbidity or mortality is planned.
● PME students must inform the supervising faculty staff member before discharging a patient from hospital care or the emergency room.
● In the interest of patient safety, PME students must inform their supervising faculty staff member if they are not able to care for all of the patients who have been delegated to them. An inability, by the PME students to provide adequate care may arise from the number and complexity of the patients assigned or because of stress or fatigue.
● PME students must inform the residency Program Director when they believe that they have insufficient supervision and/or the supervising faculty staff member is not responsive to their reasonable requests for the assistance in the care of delegated patients.
● PME students must complete their rotation evaluation at the end of each clinical rotation.

6. **Responsibilities of the Program Director and Resident Program Committee**

While respecting the provisions of the PARA contract, PME students are expected to provide for the after-hours care of their patients. It is not the responsibility of the Medical Education programs, the Residency Program Committee, the Program Directors or the Postgraduate Dean to ensure scheduled coverage of clinical services if so doing is in conflict with the postgraduate training objectives or the provisions of the PARA agreement.

In the event that a supervising faculty staff member consistently fails to provide adequate supervision of PME students, the chairperson of that department or the postgraduate dean, in consultation with the Program Director and the Residency Program Committee may:

- Provide written feedback outlining their concerns and suggested solutions.
- Provide counseling and further training to enable the supervising faculty staff member to fulfill their supervisory role.
- Dismiss the supervising faculty staff member from further participation in the postgraduate training program.

7. **Responsibilities of the Postgraduate Medical Education Office**

The Postgraduate Medical Education office will provide educational materials and workshops to faculty members where there is an identified need regarding the implementation of this policy.