

# The curricular internship in primary health care during the COVID-19 pandemic: challenges and reinventions for Dentistry education

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**Abstract** The Law Decree n. 6/2020 recognized the occurrence of public calamity due to COVID-19, which led to the interruption of in-person activities in higher education institutions. The aim of this report is to describe and analyze the experience of professors and undergraduate Dentistry students in curricular internships in Primary Health Care (PHC) during Emergency Distance Learning (EDL). This paper reports the experience of professors and monitors with three classes from the last but one semester of a daytime Dentistry course in the academic period between 2020/1 and 2021/2, adding up to 109 students. Institutional documents and professors' records on teaching activities were consulted. The method used was Systematization of Experiences. In August 2020, with the onset of EDL, the internship was reorganized, and the workload redistributed, preparing the students for later work at PHC. After January 2021, the internship, which faced challenges and reinventions, was developed in hybrid modality with practical experiences in Basic Health Units (UBS). Regarding the challenges, the training for virtual teaching is highlighted, as well as learning to deal with lost lives, the termination of contracts of UBS professionals, the restricted number of services to assist the accumulated classes and the expectation of clinical performance of students as opposed to the health restrictions. Concerning the reinventions, the most outstanding are filling and signing terms virtually and opening internship fields in countryside cities. The reconfigurations of internship aimed at the integration between theory and practice; besides the students' graduation, it enabled the acquisition of didactic-pedagogical framework for the development of professional skills.

**Descriptors:** Primary Health Care. Internships. Dentistry. COVID-19.

## La pasantía curricular en atención primaria de salud durante la pandemia COVID-19: desafíos y reinenciones para la formación en Odontología

**Resumen** Decreto Legislativo núm. 6/2020 reconoció la ocurrencia de un estado de calamidad pública por causa del COVID-19, que motivó la suspensión de actividades presenciales en las instituciones de educación superior. El objetivo de este informe fue describir y analizar la experiencia de profesores y estudiantes de pregrado en Odontología en prácticas curriculares en Atención Primaria a la Salud (APS) durante la Educación a Distancia de Emergencia (ERE). Se trata de un informe de la experiencia de docentes y monitores con tres clases del penúltimo semestre de una carrera diurna de Odontología, en el periodo académico comprendido entre 2020/1 y 2021/2, totalizando 109 estudiantes. Se consultaron documentos institucionales y registros docentes sobre la actividad docente. El método utilizado fue la Sistematización de Experiencias. En agosto de 2020, con el inicio del ERE, se reorganizó la ruta de prácticas y se redistribuyó la carga horaria, preparándose los estudiantes para su posterior trabajo en la APS. A partir de enero de 2021, la pasantía, que enfrentó desafíos y reinenciones, se desarrolló en una modalidad híbrida con experiencias prácticas en Unidades Básicas de Salud (UBS). En cuanto a los desafíos, destaca la formación para la docencia virtual; aprender a lidiar con las vidas perdidas; la rescisión de contratos de los profesionales de la UBS, la restricción del número de servicios para atender las clases acumuladas y la expectativa de desempeño clínico de los estudiantes versus las restricciones sanitarias. En relación con las reinenciones, las más destacadas son la cumplimentación y firma de plazos de forma virtual y la apertura de campamentos de pasantías en ciudades del interior. Las reconfiguraciones de la pasantía buscaron la integración entre teoría y práctica y permitieron, además de la graduación de los

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estudiantes, la adquisición del marco didáctico-pedagógico para el desarrollo de habilidades profesionales.

**Descritores:** Atención Primaria de Salud, Pasantías. Odontología. COVID-19.

### **O estágio curricular na atenção primária à saúde durante a pandemia de COVID-19: desafios e reinvenções para a formação em Odontologia**

**Resumo** O Decreto Legislativo n. 6/2020 reconheceu a ocorrência do estado de calamidade pública em razão da COVID-19, o que suscitou a suspensão das atividades presenciais nas instituições de ensino superior. O objetivo deste relato foi descrever e analisar a experiência de docentes e estudantes de graduação em Odontologia nos estágios curriculares na Atenção Primária à Saúde (APS) durante o Ensino Remoto Emergencial (ERE). Trata-se de um relato de experiência de docentes e monitoras com três turmas do penúltimo semestre de um curso diurno de Odontologia, no período letivo entre 2020/1 a 2021/2, totalizando 109 estudantes. Foram consultados documentos institucionais e registros dos docentes sobre as atividades de ensino. O método utilizado foi o de Sistematização de Experiências. Em agosto de 2020, com o início do ERE, o percurso do estágio foi reorganizado e a carga horária redistribuída, com os estudantes sendo preparados para posterior atuação na APS. A partir de janeiro de 2021, o estágio, que enfrentou desafios e reinvenções, foi desenvolvido na modalidade híbrida com vivências práticas nas Unidades Básicas de Saúde (UBS). Em relação aos desafios, destacam-se a capacitação para o ensino virtual; o aprendizado de lidar com as vidas perdidas; a rescisão de contratos dos profissionais das UBS, o número restrito de serviços para atender as turmas acumuladas e a expectativa de atuação clínica dos estudantes versus as restrições sanitárias. Relacionado às reinvenções, destacam-se o preenchimento e assinatura dos termos virtualmente e abertura de campos de estágio nas cidades do interior. As reconfigurações do estágio buscaram a integração entre a teoria e a prática e possibilitaram, além da formatura dos estudantes, a aquisição do arcabouço didático-pedagógico para o desenvolvimento de competências profissionais.

**Descritores:** Atenção Primária à Saúde. Estágios. Odontologia. COVID-19.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic surprised everyone with its suddenness and expansion throughout the world, including Brazil. Its arrival in the country became public in March 2020. A week after the onset of classes, the university community was surprised by Ordinance N. 343 of March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, which interrupted the in-person activities at higher education institutions<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, this ordinance was revoked by Ordinance N. 544 of June 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, defining that the institutions were responsible for adapting the curricula to offer practical disciplines, including internships<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, the concept of liquid modernity of Bauman (2001)<sup>3</sup>, which refers to space-time compression and the challenges of dealing with uncertainties and temporariness, could aid as a theoretical basis for reflections on what was experienced in 2020 and 2021 in all fields, especially education and health. In this century, since other epidemics had been quickly controlled and their lethality was usually not high, it was believed that everything would pass within few weeks and return to normal. However, several months passed and this did not happen. At first all individuals were affected by a feeling of immobilization, yet soon several institutional groups organized themselves to face the uncertainties, temporariness and fear triggered by this situation.

In August 2020, the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), through Resolution N. 25 of July 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, began the Emergency Distance Learning (EDL)<sup>4</sup>. It was initially believed that students in the ninth semester of the daytime undergraduate Dentistry course who had already signed the forms of the Supervised Curricular Internship I of Dentistry (ECS 1) before the interruption of teaching activities could initiate their insertion in the Basic Health Units of Porto Alegre and metropolitan region, yet this was only possible in early 2021, when the scenario was

more controlled and vaccination against COVID-19 was ongoing. Thus, after several meetings with the Dentistry Course Graduation Committee (COMGRAD-ODO), the teaching plan was adapted, and it was decided to offer synchronous and asynchronous activities to students aimed at learning and discussions of issues related to Primary Health Care (PHC) simulating the situations of realities experienced in health services by case studies and data searches in information systems.

In November 2020, when the pandemic seemed to be reducing, the biannual contacts that had been interrupted with managers of Municipal Health Departments and the coordination of Basic Health Units were returned to insert the students in the practical curriculum after January 2021, required for training. Many setbacks mobilized the professors to maintain the learning that was possible and necessary at that moment. According to Piconez (2015)<sup>5</sup>, *“practice without theory and theory without practice cannot coexist, because, in short, there is no theory in emptiness; no disjointed empiricism.”* The author emphasizes that there must be a dialogical relationship between theory and practice, *“in which theory is determined by the precise knowledge of practice and in which, in turn, theory determines its experience more strictly”*.

Studies in the health area<sup>6-8</sup> indicate a concern about the development of internships in health services regarding the risks of COVID-19 infection, since there was little knowledge on the transmission and treatment of disease and there was still no vaccine available to prevent the virus effects. In the field of Nursing, the supervised curricular internships required individual and collective protection measures, based on biosafety and social distancing protocols. In this context, health education activities were conducted with a minimum number of users and maintaining restrictive measures.

In relation to Dentistry internships, the protocols of the Ministry of Health, National Health Surveillance Agency, Federal Dental Council and the guidelines of the Brazilian Association of Dental Education<sup>9-12</sup> were also followed. At the University, the Committee to Fight COVID-19 played a fundamental role in providing guidance to the academic community, especially when returning the practical activities<sup>13</sup>. The students' performance during internships followed the guidelines of the Municipal Health Departments. Initially, elective dental appointments were interrupted and only emergencies and care for pregnant women were possible in PHC services<sup>14</sup>. The Oral Health Teams worked directly to fight the pandemic, helping to welcome, screen and test people seeking health services and, after April 2021, the teams that wished so also participated in the application of vaccines against COVID-19 and Influenza<sup>15,16</sup>.

The objective of this report was to describe and analyze the experience of professors and undergraduate Dentistry students in curricular internships in Primary Health Care (PHC) during Emergency Distance Learning (EDL).

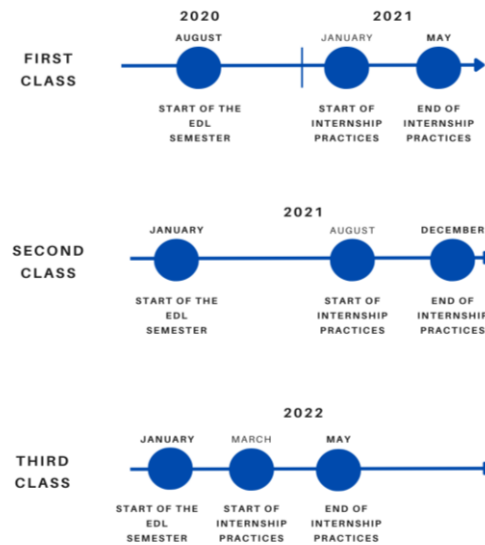
## EXPERIENCE REPORT

This is an experience report by four professors and two monitors who jointly experienced the teaching-learning process of three ECS 1 classes of the daytime undergraduate course at UFRGS over a two-year period, from 2020 to 2022.

Figure 1 shows the internship period for each of the three classes of the ninth semester of the Dentistry course. The class of students in the first semester of 2020 was composed of 46 students, the second class of 31 students and the third had 32 students, adding up to 109 students. Both classes were guided by the same four professors and one monitor at each academic period.

To describe and analyze this experience, the teaching plan prepared before the pandemic, the modified plans with adapted context, the higher education ordinances and resolutions issued by the Ministry of Education and the University in force during the pandemic were consulted, as well as the records of professors and monitors present in the memory and writings about the interaction with the students. The methodological framework used was Systematization of Experiences<sup>17</sup>. This systematization is developed in five stages, namely: starting point (living the experience); initial questions (define the objective, delimit the object to be systematized, identify the systematization axis, select the sources

of information and procedures); recovery of the experienced process (reconstructing the story and ordering/classifying the information); background reflection (analyze and synthesize the experience) and arrival Points (conclusions and communication of learning).



**Figure 1.** Timeline of training in ECS 1 of the three classes during EDL at the School of Dentistry, UFRGS, 2022.

The writings of Bauman<sup>3,18</sup> about the cultural characteristics of “Liquid Modernity” were used as a theoretical contribution: transience, uncertainty, temporariness, flexibility. Based on analysis of the empirical material, the following units of analysis were created: Internship Path and Changes in the Pandemic Context and Implementation of Internship Practices: Challenges and Reinventions during the Pandemic.

#### *Internship Path and Changes in the Pandemic Context*

Since the curricular restructuring of UFRGS Dentistry course in 2005 and complying with the National Curricular Guidelines (DCN) for Dentistry courses, training in ECS 1 has had a strong insertion in the primary care services of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS). Since the creation of curricular internships and until 2019, the total workload of 465 hours is divided into 125 theoretical hours of in-person collective meetings and autonomous activities in the University's virtual learning environment Moodle Academic and 340 individual practical hours, to be fully developed in PHC services<sup>19-22</sup>. In general, each student is assigned to a health service under supervision of a preceptor. However, some services receive two students with different preceptors.

To meet the limitations of the pandemic that required several restrictions and sanitary care, ECS 1 was reorganized into a hybrid teaching modality, starting with synchronous activities on the MConf and Microsoft Teams platforms replacing the in-person activities and maintaining the asynchronous activities in the Moodle environment, later followed by practices in SUS. Thus, in the first class in the EDL modality, conducted from August to December 2020, it was possible to complete the planned 125 hours of theoretical activities (Figure 1). Case studies, seminars, discussion of videos and films, work in small groups and large groups were conducted, under the guidance of professors, aiming to prepare the student for teamwork in the daily routine of services while simultaneously delaying their insertion in the services due to the pandemic, waiting for a more favorable and safe time. Also, part of the practical activity workload was reorganized and offered virtually by online courses with important themes for work in primary care.

In asynchronous remote classes, the students had access to video classes previously recorded by professors, texts and recommended references for each weekly content, available on Academic Moodle. Asynchronous classes were available to students by links on this platform. These involved reading articles, searching for data in health

information systems and performing activities, participating in forums to prepare seminars, preparing and posting field diaries and other activities planned by professors. The field diaries were tools used by students to communicate and contextualize professors about their experiences and confrontations. The synchronous activities were conducted on the institutional Mconf and Microsoft Teams platforms and involved activities by video conferences for the presentation of seminars by students and invited lecturers. When the practices began in January 2021, collective tutorials with students, professors, preceptors and monitors were also offered remotely on these platforms.

There was an institutional concern in enabling professors to have free access to teaching platforms, and for students to have equipment to monitor the activities. Several measures were taken to financially assist low-income student through the Deanship of Student Affairs (PRAE). In addition to the existing benefits program, there was an emergency aid that favored the student's permanence in teaching activities, with the purchase of tablets or similar devices and chips with mobile data packages<sup>23</sup>. Training was also provided to the academic community to develop skills and abilities to work in virtual teaching through the UFRGS Server Development School<sup>24</sup>.

As mentioned, the EDL began in August 2020 and the internship teaching plan required modifications to make it feasible. The onset of EDL was a new experience for everyone in the university community. After several months without in-person contact, meetings took place virtually, with professors and students facing several difficulties in handling the new teaching tools. It was necessary to quickly learn how to deal with the difficulties, as Bauman announced<sup>18</sup>, when discussing the idea of "education for life", required in the context of liquid modernity in which the students and professors had to face "the impact of the change pace drastically accelerated in the social environment". Also, the expectation of students in the ninth semester was to graduate in Dentistry by the end of 2020, yet the pandemic postponed this expectation.

Other Dentistry courses in the country also adopted teaching-learning strategies in the EDL modality, using simulations of what occurs in PHC<sup>8</sup>. For example, in the Dentistry course at the State University of Paraíba, a group entitled "Virtual Outpatient Conexão Odonto" was created in a messaging application with participation of 50 students and 4 professors. In this space, fictitious clinical cases were shared, created based on the experience of the teaching staff and consistent with real situations experienced in PHC<sup>8</sup>.

The study by Warmling and Moysés (2021)<sup>25</sup> emphasizes the expanded use of technologies in remote teaching and the possibilities for innovation in pedagogical practices, with emphasis on internships. Some exercises described by the authors are part of the ECS 1 Teaching Plan, and virtual technologies were adopted by the professors to develop them in this report during EDL, such as: territorialization, use of information systems to characterize the places where internships occur, discussion of family approach proposals, use of genogram and approaches, programs and actions in PHC in the phases of the life cycle.

During the internship, only one student interrupted the course at the onset of 2020. Some students lost family and friends along the way, and few were infected by the coronavirus and developed COVID-19. Each of them, at their own pace, managed to continue the course. In this sense, EDL played an important role in the students' performance, since it allowed each of them to perform the proposed activities and fulfill the requirements for learning and passing this stage of their training.

One of the activities conducted with the students at the onset of the academic semester was the construction of a word cloud that had meaning for them in the moment they were experiencing. The word cloud constructed at the first meeting in August 2020 explains the students' expectations, highlighting the words "adaptation" and "resilience" that define the complexity of space-time experienced (Figure 2). A culture of adaptation and resilience toward the context experienced is fundamental for the teaching and learning process<sup>26</sup>.

The same strategy in relation to the first contact between professors and monitors with students was used for the second class, in January 2021. Figure 3 highlights the words learning, anxiety and maturation for this class.



**Figure 2.** Word cloud constructed in the first meeting with students of the first ECS1 class about expectations regarding the return of activities with EDL in August 2020.



**Figure 3.** Word cloud constructed in the first meeting with students from the second class about expectations regarding the return of activities with EDL and the internship in January 2021.

The entry of the third class into ECS 1, though during a period of worsening of the pandemic with the introduction of the Omicron variant in the country, did not cause much fear, since all students had received at least one vaccine shot and had returned to their practical activities at the Dental Teaching Hospital (HEO) during other discipline of the ninth semester of the course, thus they felt prepared to work in PHC. They were trained to adopt the appropriate biosafety measures and had assisted patients in the integrated clinics during the pandemic. The brief break between one academic semester and another to make up for the lost time caused fatigue and tension between both parties. The partnership between the preceptors in welcoming the students and the virtual interaction allowed us to move forward; however, the fulfillment of activities foreseen in the teaching plan and the workload of practices in a reduced time triggered episodes of anxiety in the students, which required listening and dialogue by the professors to build new agreements.

The field diaries periodically written by the students said a lot about the silence and fear symbolized in the closed cameras of students' computers and in the questions shared among professors: "to whom do we speak, what could this silence represent?", was a question asked after each meeting in the virtual environment. Unusual and challenging moments were experienced with the three groups. There was a teaching plan to be fulfilled despite the flexibility and a commitment to society to continue training qualified professionals.



*Implementation of Internship Practices: Challenges and Reinventions during the Pandemic*

In the middle of the second semester of 2020, when the pandemic seemed to be stabilized from an epidemiological standpoint, discussions began with COMGRAD-ODO and students on how practices could be developed in PHC services. When the first class enrolled in ECS 1 started at EDL, there was no vaccination against COVID-19 available to the population, which occurred in 2021. Other Dentistry courses also had their activities suspended and internships were adapted to the context<sup>7,8</sup>.

To prepare the insertion of students in services, there were several concerns, including training them to adopt the appropriate biosafety measures to avoid coronavirus infection. During the EDL, training for the Clinical Management of COVID-19 course in PHC at the Open University of SUS (UNASUS) was instituted. There was a discussion about the use of PPE and recommended biosafety standards. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the working groups at the School of Dentistry that created guidance videos for students, technicians and professors. There were arrangements with the services to ensure the supply of necessary equipment, such as N95 masks and waterproof coats, and the college arranged for the delivery of face shields for students. The University prepared a statement in which the health student was aware of the risks, which precautions had to be taken in the face of the pandemic and in which they expressed their desire or not to start internship practices.

In health services, to prevent and control the occurrence of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), a set of safety measures were adopted before and during care. In pre-service, preference was given to prior screening of patients with flu syndrome by telephone, scheduling spaced appointments to minimize contact in the waiting room and advising patients not to bring companions, except if assistance was needed. During the service, the complete use of PPE, hand hygiene, air quality management and cleaning and disinfection of surfaces comprised the main measures<sup>11</sup>. Oliveira and Pontes (2022)<sup>7</sup> reported the experience of following the Dentistry internship at a UBS with a Family Health Strategy in Rio de Janeiro and highlighted the importance of biosafety protocols and adaptations adopted for the return of student activities in emergency practice scenarios, in which they adapted their actions to the precautions imposed by the new situation.

To allow the onset of practices with the first ECS1 class, the service coordinators were contacted again at the Municipal Health Department (SMS) of Porto Alegre, at Grupo Hospitalar Conceição (GHC) and at the SMS in the metropolitan region. There was a fear of receiving students by institutions due to the reduced spaces and sanitary conditions of COVID-19. The SMS in Porto Alegre was already receiving students from other undergraduate courses in the health area and was available. However, the situation of employees at the Municipal Institute for Family Health Strategy (IMESF) had returned to discussion by the municipal management with the health privatization plan in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul. The context allowed students to enter immediately. In September 2020, these employees were dismissed, including dental professionals who worked in several UBS that were training camps. It was necessary to wait for their replacement before making further contacts in an unstable scenario. At SMS in Novo Hamburgo, the welcome of students was maintained, and the number of places was increased. In the SMS at Canoas, the technical cooperation term had expired and there would not be enough time to process it considering the change of municipal management.

The number of places available at the UBS was not sufficient for the number of students. When this fact was communicated to the students, they suggested that they could undergo training at UBS in their home municipalities. It is noteworthy that, at this time, the proactivity of students was fundamental in achieving the expansion of internship fields necessary for everyone. Thinking together about the group/community problem and the search for solutions to solve the problem, such as the insufficient number of internship fields, allowed the student to identify with the situation and to think and collaborate collectively<sup>27</sup>.

To enable the students' suggestion, some meetings were held with COMGRAD and the Teaching Center of the School of Dentistry. One of the aspects covered was to check how the terms would be processed, so that the parties involved with responsibility on the internship did not need to travel and everything could be done in a virtual environment. Thus, the University's electronic system began to be used to enable the process to evolve. For that purpose, the professors

created a script for the students. Another fact that marked this moment was the municipal elections, since management changes ended up interfering with the agreements that were being made. There was persistence by professors and students to restart negotiations when this happened. The distribution of each class of students in the municipalities and the number of training fields in PHC are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of students from three classes of the daytime Dentistry course by municipality in Rio Grande do Sul in the Supervised Curricular Internship I in the academic semesters from 2020/1 to 2021/2.

MUNICIPALITIES/SMS	1st class		2nd class		3rd class		
	Number of UBS*	Number of students	Number of UBS*	Number of students	Number of UBS*	Number of students	
Porto Alegre	North Coordination	10	14	11	12	7	9
	East Coordination	6	9	5	5	5	5
	South Coordination	1	4	3	3	4	5
	West Coordination	6	7	6	6	7	7
Metropolitan Region	Novo Hamburgo	3	3	3	3	2	2
	Canoas	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Gravataí	0	0	0	0	1	1
Countryside Municipalities	Arvorezinha	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Cruzeiro do Sul	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Gramado	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Guaporé	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Osório	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Sapiranga	2	2	0	0	0	0
	Salvador do Sul	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Tapera	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Taquara	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Torres	1	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	35	46	29	31	29	32	

\* Basic Health Units (Unidades Básicas de Saúde)

In the first class, there was a greater number of vacancies in the UBS of the Municipal Health Department of Porto Alegre (SMS-POA); however, several students (n=9) took the ECS1 in their city of origin. In some UBS there was rotation of students; after one group finished, another group started, as observed in the South Coordination. There was effective participation of students in addressing these limitations, which was productive in problem solving.

In the second group, the preceptors of units at SMS-POA had been replaced. However, another challenge arose; some preceptors were dental professionals without experience in preceptorship and were under the management of outsourced institutions that were unaware of the functioning of ECS1, since the municipal management, after the extinction of IMESF, transferred the hiring of employees to Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Porto Alegre, Divina Providência Hospital and Vila Nova Hospital Association. Another fact that marked this class was the completion of ECS1 over a longer period, as the weekly teaching hours were also used for the development of ECS2, after the students' discussions with COMGRAD-ODO.

The third group included the municipalities of Canoas, Gravataí and just one municipality in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul, Osório. Before this group began the internship, changes occurred in the administrative and management structures that organized health care in the city of Porto Alegre. The territory was divided into seventeen district administrations distributed across eight health regions that were combined to form four Coordination Units. The North coordination included the district administrations Noroeste/Humaitá/Navegantes/Ilha and Norte/Eixo Baltazar; the East coordination was formed by the combination of East/Northeast and Partenon/Lomba do Pinheiro district administrations; the South coordination resulted from the union of South/Central South and Restinga/Extreme South district administrations; and the West coordination by the Glória/Cruzeiro/Cristal and Center district managements<sup>28</sup>. This change



in structure of the SMS/POA also led to new combinations regarding the flow of terms and internship fields.

New challenges appeared every day, despite the concern to predict the steps along this path. In liquid times, planning is short-term, as Bauman (2001)<sup>3</sup> mentions, preventing "the establishment of references for human actions, as well as long-term planning strategies, since it leads us to a condition of temporariness and constant uncertainty"<sup>29</sup>. Digitization of the process of signing, forwarding and approving internship terms was essential for the return of practices in PHC services. It was found that communication by email or WhatsApp messages was not always efficient and fast as necessary for processing the internship terms and understanding the parties involved, thus adjustments were necessary in each new experiment.

The partnership of countryside municipalities with the demand of students was a possible experiment in the context of the first class, in which the subjects were not in person, yet it was difficult to combine the schedules with the return to service at HEO in the subsequent classes, leaving only municipalities closer to Porto Alegre, such as Novo Hamburgo, Canoas, Gravataí, Cruzeiro do Sul and Osório, being unfeasible in more distant municipalities due to displacement.

The need to train preceptors to receive students was another concern for professors during the course of EDL, due to the turnover of professionals, both due to provisional professional contracts and the pandemic context. Besides sharing the teaching plan by email with each preceptorship group, virtual meetings were held on Google Meet and videos were made available on YouTube that guided, at each semester, how preceptors should monitor the students, record the frequency and fill the evaluation form. The contact details of tutors for individual demands were also available.

ECS1 students were important actors in helping teams fight the pandemic, such as welcoming symptomatic people, helping with vaccinations and collecting tests. This happened with other undergraduate courses and health residencies, in which the participation of nursing students in the Family Health Strategy (ESF) contributed to meeting extra nursing demands, assisting in health actions for users and professionals of the unit, by lectures with relevant topics during the pandemic<sup>6</sup>.

After several reconfigurations and seeking to maintain integration between theory and practice, in a hybrid teaching model, three classes were formed during this period. Each academic semester was developed in different periods, according to necessary adjustments due to the pandemic context. The semester of the first class was developed in 39 weeks; however, there were 22 weeks of waiting until the EDL started, totaling 54 weeks. The semester took place in 48 weeks for the second class and 18 weeks for the third class, which is the conventional period.

In this context, the reinvention of the teaching and learning process was challenging, and from the professors' perspective it was effective and powerful for the training and learning of Dentistry and its insertions and dialogues in primary health care.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the setbacks inherent to the pandemic context, the three groups of students completed the curricular internship practices and highlighted the importance of this training in PHC, which allows to reflect on the path taken and share it with other professors, courses and institutions. Among the challenges, emphasis is given to the need for training to adopt new biosafety measures due to COVID-19 and the difficulty of combining schedules with the return of services at HEO, in the second and third classes. Related to the reinventions, the terms began to be signed virtually, there was creation of videos on PHC themes by professors, proactiveness of students in seeking internship fields in their municipalities, enhancement of the use of Moodle as a repository of terms, information sheets frequency and evaluation. Also, there were arrangements with the services and management of the School of Dentistry to ensure the supply of PPE.

The importance of effective communication and joint work between professors, monitors, students, managers and preceptors is highlighted, so that the development of curricular internships during the COVID-19 pandemic was possible.

The support of the graduation committee was essential for adopting the actions that allowed the return to practice, including curricular internships.

The proactivity of professors and monitors in facing adversities in the teaching-learning process in the context of the pandemic was fundamental to the organizational arrangement, which allowed students to effectively complete the curricular internship.

The various reconfigurations of the internship sought to maintain the integration between theory and practice, in a hybrid teaching model, and allowed the graduation of classes. The uncertainties of an unpredictable context gave rise to countless reflections and flexibility along this path. Reinventing the teaching and learning process was challenging.

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