

FOCUSING ON THE RISKS OF HOMEBOUND WORK

Online meetings, teaching and learning on electronic devices during the COVID-19 era might lead to serious and permanent health risks in the future.

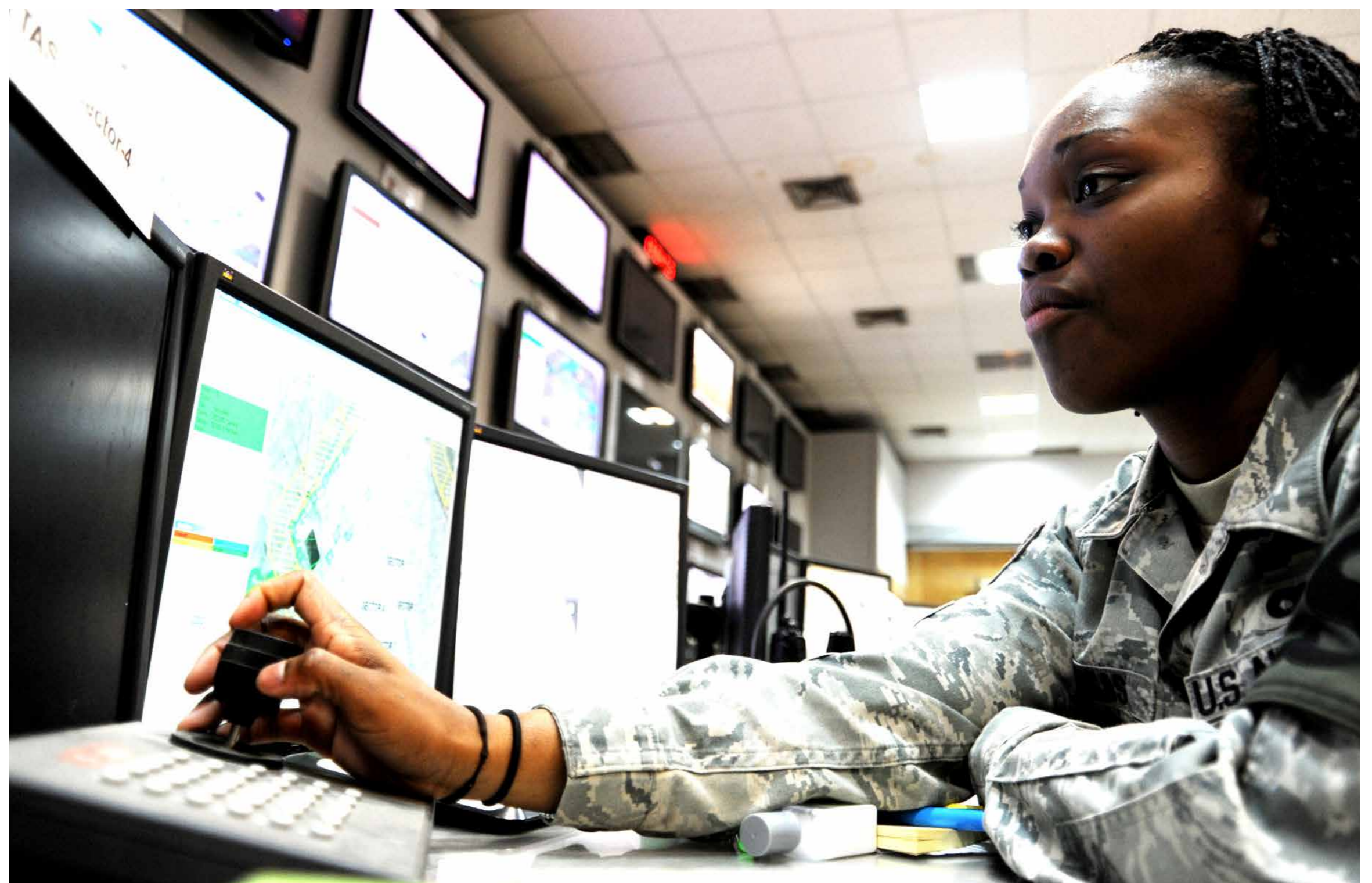
Keeping a social distance, even from family and friends, has become the “new normal” during the COVID-19 pandemic. People across the world are increasingly using e-devices to connect socially, for education and for work. This may have far-reaching consequences for the musculoskeletal and visual systems of users.

A group of researchers in the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s DRILL programme have highlighted some of these risks in a commentary recently accepted for publication in the South African Journal of Science.

“Poor posture with the extensive use of e-devices can increase back, neck, shoulder and wrist pain for children and young adults. This has the potential to become more severe as people get older,” says Saul Cobbing, one of the commentary co-authors.

Prolonged screen time can also lead to eye health concerns such as short-sightedness for people of all ages.

“The blue light emissions from e-devices can also cause headaches and disrupted sleep patterns. This may then lead to emotional distress and difficulties with concentration



Increased screen time during the COVID-19 era could lead to permanent health complications.

and memory,” says Cobbing. “These problems are of particular concern for the parents of learners who are using e-devices far more extensively during the enforced lockdown period.”

These risks are often overlooked due to the focus on the medical management of COVID-19.

“These complications have the potential to become a serious public health issue. It is vital that health professionals develop and communicate information regarding these risks to ensure that the public remains healthy.”

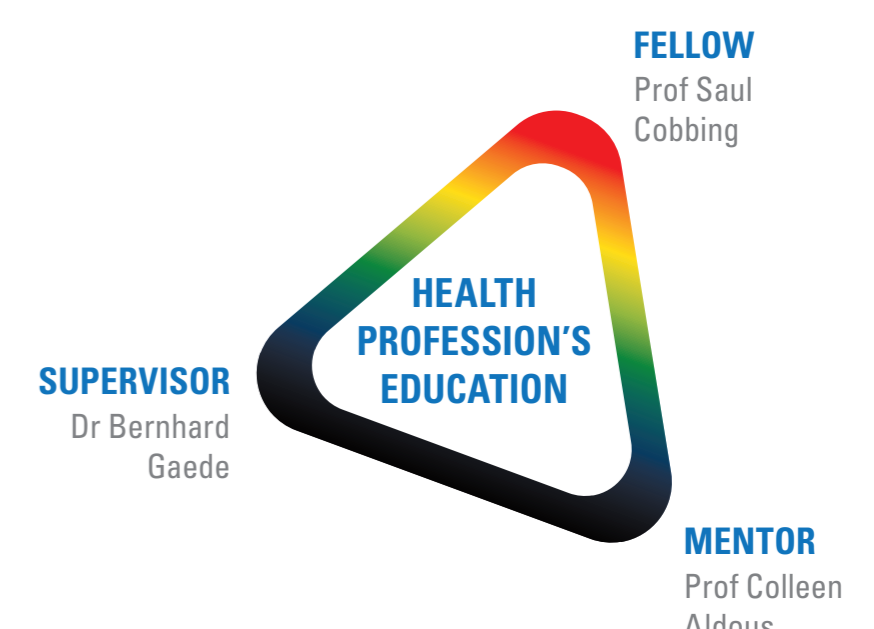


Towards Research Leadership

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Developing Research Innovation, Localisation and Leadership (DRILL) is a health sciences training programme producing research excellence in South Africa. DRILL creates a triad of support for emerging researchers.



Chetty V, Cobbing S, Munsamy A, Naidoo R & Van Staden D (2020). “The emerging public health risk of extended electronic device use during the COVID-19 pandemic.” Accepted for publication in the *South African Journal of Science* (19 June 2020). Authors are all postdoctoral fellows in the UKZN DRILL programme.



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