

COVID-19 and the World of Medical Education—A New Lesson Learned!

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ABSTRACT

Due to the global pandemic, this face-to-face physical engagement is not possible; therefore, we are able to recreate a similar environment with the advent of online teaching methods and the use of social media for the same. Distant education can ensure real-time face-to-face online studies with the aid of chat rooms while keeping at bay the real-time interaction. Teaching and assessment in classrooms have now been completely replaced by virtual classrooms.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online classes, Medical education.

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INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, education laid emphasis on face-to-face physical transfer of wisdom and knowledge from the teachers. Due to the global pandemic, this face-to-face physical engagement is not possible; therefore, we are able to recreate a similar environment with the advent of online teaching methods and the use of social media for the same.¹ Distant education can ensure real-time face-to-face online studies with the aid of chat rooms while keeping at bay the real-time interaction. Classrooms have now been completely replaced by virtual classrooms.

DISCUSSION

Virtual classrooms have played the most significant role in aiding in this e-learning experience through various online learning platforms, like Zoom, Google classrooms, etc. The advantage of these online platforms is that it has brought flexibility of learning in the comfort zones of homes using affordable technology and maintaining social distancing and prevention of the spread of disease simultaneously. Online classes enable the comfort of attending classes by any national or international faculties even without physical presence. Both students and teachers are new to this method of education and finding ways to make this method close to the regular teaching process. Both students and teachers are in the learning phase for the same. Online classes have been ongoing for preprimary students to postgraduation residents since the pandemic struck and the subsequent worldwide lockdown.² Continuous uninterrupted internet connection is a major technical problem faced by both students and teachers, especially in a rural setup apart from the need for electronic gadgets and expertise in the same.

With the advent of this newer modality of education, there is the emergence of a lot more complications also. The excessive use of these gadgets like mobile phones, computers, tablets, etc., cause physical and mental damage to children adding to the preexisting stress due to the pandemic itself. There can be an increased incidence of headaches, photophobia, strain to the eyes and the ears, fatigue, insomnia, and stress.³ There can also be cognitive and behavioral changes which include distraction and lack of interest during the class. Interaction between teacher and

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student in the online platform is not face-to-face and students miss the opportunity to learn the importance of eye contact and body language which are of immense importance in the medical field. The attention span of students is drastically reduced via online platforms and assessment cannot be done.

There are many limitations of conducting medical education on an online platform. Theoretical aspects can be taught whereas clinical skills cannot. Already hospitals and the healthcare system are burdened with a surge in cases and difficulties of managing the pandemic. So, doctors are already at the forefront of patient care and they are also involved in these online teaching programs.⁴ Online teaching fails in training basic clinical skills for the medical students like checking the pulse, blood pressure, vitals, etc. Clinical scenarios can be given for teaching purposes but eliciting clinical signs and emphasizing their importance are next to impossible. Online simulation videos can be shown to the students but bedside examination and skill transfer can be done only once this pandemic is over and life gets back to normal. No amount of videos, pictures, or simulation can be equivalent to bedside clinical classes and skill transfer.⁵ Minds of the students can be stimulated and the spark for the quest for knowledge be ignited.

As this pandemic is expected to stay for the better part of this year and there are no clear instructions and notifications on the reopening of schools and colleges in the near future, both teachers and students have to depend solely on online platforms.⁶ Ill effects

of these electronic devices and psychological effects like lack of interest and distraction of these online classes have to be kept in mind by the educators. Need of the hour is to create a holistic blend of online classes and face-to-face learning with the aid of online teaching platforms.

Physical classes can cater to all categories of students. Bright and above-average students can be catered to well both through online classes and physical classes whereas poor learners are not. "SNACS" (Students Needing Additional Curricular Support) and slow learners need additional attention and support which is provided better by physical classes. While online classes cater sufficiently to bright and above-average students academically, its efficacy for slow learners is a debatable question.

Another point of interest is the conduct of assessment through online platforms. Weekly tests and internal assessments have been conducted in various learning management system platforms or Google forms. Due to the ongoing pandemic situation, even university exams are conducted on online platforms like Zoom and Google Meet wherein the external experts assess the students via these online platforms.

CONCLUSION

As the saying goes a good teacher stimulates a sound mind. So, be it physical classes or online classes, the whole idea of teaching is to stimulate the mind of students. So, it is the duty of the students to get the crux of what is taught and take home the message. Online

teaching is a great teaching method for both teachers and students, but the significance of online classes in medical education needs a second thought as it has the above-mentioned merits and demerits.

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