Impact of online medical education on the educational environment during the COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives of a medical student

We read with profound interest the review by Vishwanathan et al[1] titled, “Impact and perception about distant online medical education (teleeducation) on the educational environment during the COVID19 pandemic: Experiences of medical undergraduate students from India” published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care (July 2021), which investigated the educational environment in a medical college located in a rural area of India during the COVID19 pandemic. As medical students from a different part of India, we found the well-researched study both inspiring and stimulating. The perceptions, experience, and satisfaction of medical students, with the use of videoconference platforms for online teaching, have been assessed in a scientific manner. Inclusion of students from all batches of the MBBS course has enabled effective evaluation of the efficacy of the digital platform at the preclinical, paraclinical, and clinical levels. We fully concur with the authors that one of the major advantages of online teaching is more effective time management. However, while the shift from the traditional methods of teaching and training to the online mode has met with considerable success in certain institutions,[1,2] this has not been a uniform trend, due to constraints of logistics and infrastructure. Accessibility to online modes of teaching has been limited, especially for those from economically deprived or from certain rural backgrounds. This situation holds true for several low- and middle-income countries.[3] Issues of poor net connectivity and distractions from surroundings due to limited space have also been frequent impediments to successful student engagement, which was compounded by the closure of hostel facilities in most medical colleges where better study environment and information technology (IT) services are usually available. This may be the case even in institutions wherein the online teaching platform has been apparently successful. The present study mentions that students who did not attend a single session of interactive e-learning session hosted by the institute were excluded from the study.[1] It would be worthwhile to investigate the underlying reasons for their nonparticipation in the e-learning sessions. The online platform no doubt has several distinct advantages such as increased flexibility, acquisition of new technical skills, and reduced long-term cost. However, contact with patients has always been regarded as essential for acquisition of clinical skills and attaining a good clinical acumen. Providing authentic patient experiences for medical students as a key component of medical education under these circumstances is indeed a challenge.[4] Another major area of concern is the assessment of the medical student’s proficiency in various subjects they have been taught during these times of COVID-19. Taking online theory and practical assessments of medical students sitting at home or elsewhere either alone or in groups and ensuring that no unfair means have been used is a daunting task and many sincere students have been mentally traumatized after the unscrupulous ones have managed to score higher grades as the medical institutions have been unable to devise fool-proof means of fair assessment on a virtual platform. The full impact of the paradigm shift in medical education is likely to unfold and become clearer in days to come, as presently the return to normalcy is unlikely to happen in the near future.

Submission declaration
The work described has not been published previously in any form, it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and if accepted, it will not be published elsewhere.

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Not applicable.

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Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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