Moving postgraduate ophthalmology education online—experiences of a nationalised live video-linked series

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To the Editor:

The postgraduate ophthalmology teaching scene in the UK has witnessed a rapid increase in the range of available online webinars [1]. As an early response to the uncertainty faced by trainees at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we organised a series of live video-linked (LVL) lectures with the intention of investigating the feasibility of national, curriculum based, consultant-led webinars accessible to all UK ophthalmology trainees. We assess the efficacy of this educational platform through speaker and participant feedback.

Participant and speaker evaluation of bi-weekly 30-min online webinars via ZOOM© (Zoom Video Communications, Inc) from April to June 2020 (28 April 2020 to 30 June 2020) were obtained through anonymous online surveys posted at the end of each session (Fig. 1). Social media portals and a designated website were also used to circulate event details.

We received a total of 213 responses from participants of every training deanery and level in the UK, including consultants. Eighty-five percent accessed the sessions from home. Ninety-five percent found it easy to interact with the speaker with only fourteen percent experiencing technical issues affecting their learning experience. Ninety-nine percent of participants would attend further LVL sessions, with sixty-six percent feeling this platform could replace traditional face-to-face (F2F) sessions (Fig. 2).

Feedback from speakers showed that 92% found interaction with attendees easy. Sixty-nine percent had taught via LVL prior to these sessions. Ninety-two percent felt they would consider teaching via this platform in the future with thirty-nine percent feeling that LVL teaching could entirely replace F2F postgraduate ophthalmology education.

To our knowledge, this is the first series of ophthalmic specialist training curriculum-focused LVL sessions delivered regularly on a national scale in the UK [2]. Feedback from participants and speakers showed a positive trend towards the future use of LVL teaching for ophthalmology. As the sessions gained popularity, a core group of regular participants from across the country became evident, thereby helping to create a virtual community of practice. In 2002, Wenger et al. defined a CoP, summarised by Ranmuthugala et al. as a “shared domain of interest, a community that pursues the shared interest, and practice or shared repertoire of resources”. Such CoPs have proven efficacy in healthcare settings, including evidence-based change in clinical practice [3, 4].

Inability to visualise the audience was highlighted by speakers as a limitation of the platform, although the negative effect of this could be mitigated partially by asking attendees to keep their video on.

Feedback for the programme showed that this method of collaborative learning was well accepted by both attendees and participants. It is likely that the future lies somewhere in between the old and the new. F2F teaching has stood the test of time and may remain the convention in many departments. However, the added benefits of LVL to share high-quality resources at a national level has huge potential to provide learners with the flexibility of how and when they learn. Future studies of this type of virtual learning should focus on improving speaker and attendee rapport and evaluating the extent of knowledge transmission when compared to traditional learning environments.
Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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