Medical Student Surgical Education Was Feasible During the COVID-19 Pandemic

We greatly appreciate the comments provided through the letter to the editor by Pandey et al in response to our manuscript entitled ‘Medical Student Education During COVID-19 Electronic Education Does Not Decrease Examination Scores’. The authors of this letter to the editor have raised several thoughtful considerations that should be addressed. While their comments offer important insight into the challenges of remote education, we believe that this article is still particularly relevant as we continue to make our way out of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and students remain in need of educational content.

The first point requiring discussion is that medical students and future physicians must develop interpersonal skills that will be utilized when communicating with patients as well as colleagues in their future careers. While this is an important consideration, and a potential drawback from remote education, the electronic problem-based learning sessions discussed in the original article were only meant to supplement learning when in-person education was unavailable. Additionally, while Pandey et al discussed a recent study demonstrating decreased interactions between peers and limited opportunities for feedback through electronic education, other studies have demonstrated improved discussions via electronic education which may be facilitated by greater comfort experienced by the learners.

In an electronic setting, students may feel less pressure when engaging in discussions and may be less embarrassed if they make an incorrect statement. An additional concern raised by Pandey et al is that there was no mention of the challenges faced by students while engaging with the electronic platforms. The survey did not specifically inquire about these challenges, but an open-ended question was included to elicit any suggestions for future electronic education suggesting that this modality of learning may be an acceptable alternative in times of medical crisis when in-person learning may not be available. Continued investigations into the long-term outcomes of electronic education are needed in future studies.

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