

Aftermath of Covid's Foray Into The Educational Scene

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ABSTRACT

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The article deals with advent of virtual classrooms in the field of medical learning as an aftermath of social distancing protocols in the current COVID-19 health scenario.

Keywords: E-Learning, Virtual Classrooms, Covid 19, Medical Education, Feasibility, Social distancing

*See End Note for complete author details

The virion COVID19 seems to have read Robert Frost's poetry, for ever since it made its first appearance, it has been marching on relentlessly with the singular aim "I have millions and millions to infect before I sleep".

The Impact on the Global Educational Scenario

Close to a billion people are still locked down, after the Coronavirus outbreak has brought life around the world to a virtual standstill. Without the glimmer of hope of an effective vaccine in the horizon yet, Social distancing is our only current best defence against COVID-19. In addition to the inevitably enormous economic consequences, the pandemic is also expected to have a devastating impact on global education. According to the latest figures released by UNESCO, some 1.3 billion learners in all capacities, around the world were unable to attend school or university as of March 23, 2020.¹

Virtual Learning-a silver lining?

Educational system across the globe haven't faced a disruption of such an enormous proportion in generations, but unlike any time in the past, technology in the present day has thankfully evolved to an admirable extent that it acts as an enabler in all manner of development, including the academia. Web-learning has become a tool of ease and convenience. Learning from the comfort of one's home has not only become possible, but highly advisable in the current health scenario. Global forums like UNICEF and UNESCO are also promoting remote learning as an alternative to institutional schooling.²

With schools and colleges closed down temporarily to promote social distancing, most of the educational communities have already taken their resources to the online platform to continue with their academic curriculum, without the loss of prescribed course duration.

SGMC's tryst with the Web

Going with the flow, Sree Gokulam Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram too has embraced the new learning format in these unprecedented times. E-Teaching as well as E-learning is a new experience for both our teachers and students alike.

The Pros of this format is definitely its feasibility during this period. A Virtual class-room, powered by commercial platforms like Skype or Zoom, of significant student participation with interactive sessions are a definite highlight. Shareability of the subject specific Powerpoint Presentations prepared beforehand ensures the availability of sufficient study material. Attendance can be ensured and Online assignments can be given to evaluate the learning curve of the students.

How to adapt?

To get the most out of this non-traditional method of e-learning, we have realised that students need to be well organized, and self-motivated. In this way, the online format does put more responsibility on the student. A student who has prepared for the expected class, by revising the topic ahead is better equipped to understand the class. The feedback of the students after a month of experimenting this new format has revealed as much.

Old is Gold?

E-learning can never fully replace the quality of the traditional methods of medical teaching. Despite the entry of simulators into the training programme a few years back, bedside clinical medicine has always remained an irreplaceable cornerstone of Medical Education. A highly interactive, one-on-one teacher student session in a brick and mortar classroom, with all possible give and take of

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knowledge is so much more fulfilling to the teacher and student alike. It is never fair to expect students following E-Classes to have the same level of concentration and involvement as in the classroom. Hence the Instructors are unable to evaluate how effective such sessions are and if every student is tuning in as expected. Sometimes the constant demands of being available online and of having to assimilate the overload of virtual information can be mentally exhausting for both the teacher and students alike. Therefore, the productivity expected from such classes can and do take a hit.

Online Classrooms are here to stay

Virtual Learning has already begun taking baby steps to being an integral part of the educational scenario in the coming millenia. The reality cannot be overlooked that these online classes can facilitate learning in times when classroom teaching is next to impossible in the practical sense. The great advantage of organising a teaching session anytime of the day, avoiding congregating in a huge classroom, will make this new modality a standard practice. This is true especially because of “the” looming threat of a delayed resolution or even a repeat performance of this pandemic in the foreseeable future, given the fact

that a successful vaccine against the virion has yet to see the light of the day. E-learning has hence arrived and is here to stay. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it needed a Virion to create a revolution in our lives and a new kind of order.

END NOTE

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