


# COVID-19 and the reintroduction of surgical training

O. Rai <sup>1,\*</sup> and R. Fernandes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>General Surgery, William Harvey Hospital, Ashford, UK

<sup>2</sup>Department of General Surgery, William Harvey Hospital, Ashford, UK

\*Correspondence to: General Surgery, William Harvey Hospital, Ashford, UK (e-mail: oman.rai1@nhs.net)

Dear Editor

Within a short period of time, COVID-19 has significantly influenced the provision of surgical services, leading to a surplus estimate of 28 million cancelled operations worldwide<sup>1,2</sup>. Although understandably frustrating for many patients, equally it has had an impact on many trainees and their training opportunities<sup>3</sup>. The effect on training is likely to be longstanding and the delivery of surgical training incorporated into the 'new-normal'. The resumption of elective activity now poses a conundrum. Operating on the waiting list backlog<sup>4</sup> within a safe environment is offset against providing educational opportunities to the next generation of surgeons. To do this requires careful planning of several factors briefly discussed below.

First, it is important to look into safely resuming an elective operating list without disrupting current systems required for COVID-19 workload. One such method is to consider commencing the use of 'clean' private hospitals<sup>5</sup> with the acquisition of temporary contracts for trainees. Furthermore, over the past decade medical training has significantly shifted towards the use of electronic platforms, including virtual reality for learning skills including endoscopy and laparoscopy. In the current circumstances, this calls more than ever for trainees to continue developing their skills through such means, and service providers should look into providing these. At our Trust, a weekly video conference is held covering curriculum topics. Moreover, the provision of

endoscopy training has been reintroduced, with smaller numbers of patients and thus greater educational opportunities.

The Royal College of Surgeons has advocated the resumption of surgical training. It is therefore pivotal for Trusts to plan the delivery of surgical education within the current pandemic. However, the nature of training is likely to be novel for both trainers and trainees. This requires both adaptation and initiative to promote educational opportunities both in the short and long term.

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## References

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