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## Webinar During COVID-19 Pandemic: Necessity or Uncontrolled Phenomena?



The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted our personal and professional lives over the last year. For the first time in the modern era, the medical community is facing a global emergency, and not only from a clinical point of view. Limiting this analysis to medical fields, there are obvious spheres affected by COVID-19. An important one is that of education and scientific events. It is well known that worldwide educational and scientific events, as well as many medical school and residency programs, were temporarily suspended, thus creating a global void in scientific programs.<sup>1</sup> To overcome this deficiency, online education and e-learning, as well as events like webinars, progressively gained popularity and today represent one of the most common ways of connecting people and sharing knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

To understand the entity of this phenomenon we can analyze the increase in downloads of the app dedicated to video-conferences: from 15 to 21 March 2020 more than 62 million downloads worldwide were recorded, and growth in the previous week had been more than 45% compared with the one before that. This seems quite normal in an era in which the key words are globalization and connection. The advantages of the web format are multiple and well-known: convenience and flexibility, reduced travel expenses and time, the possibility of “virtually” participating at many events even in a short period, adaptability to learning styles, multimedia format, and an ability to create interactive clinical cases. Moreover, from an educational point of view the webinars are effective.<sup>3,4</sup> Gegenfurtner et al.,<sup>5</sup> in their meta-analysis and systematic literature review, showed that webinars were positively associated with achievement in knowledge, behavior, and skills. In particular, alternative educational programs with online platforms and using Internet were well accepted by trainers, with more than 64% of appreciation.<sup>6</sup> These data are easy to understand considering the mean age of trainers (usually between 26 and 35 years), which makes them part of the millennial generation, more aware and comfortable with technology, online communication, and the Internet.<sup>7-9</sup> In fact, in the study presented by Al-Ahmari et al.<sup>10</sup> regarding neurosurgery education, they found a statistical difference in perception between trainers (25–36 years old) with respect to others attending (>36 years old) with 81.2% versus 56.4%, respectively, of comfort with respect to traditional lectures ( $P < 0.0001$ ). These data were also underlined in the survey on the effect of the webinar presented by Mateen Mossa et al.<sup>11</sup> in their paper: 54.6% of the participants found that webinars are better than regular congresses, 18.5% found themes similar, and 26.9% worse. But a set of factors, such as a reduction in clinical activity gaining more free time for clinicians, the impossibility of organizing events in-person opposed to the ease of organizing Web events, witnessed an uncontrolled increase in webinars month after month, covering a kaleidoscope of topics—a real and continuous bombing of scientific events. How are webinars welcomed in this scenario of increased frequency? Are they still beneficial?

A discrepancy in perception between Western countries and low-to middle-income countries (LMICs) is sometimes observed: in fact, the ability to transfer knowledge and decision-making skills among colleagues, using social media in promoting the concept of “global”

education, is advocated and beneficial especially for the clinicians from LMICs,<sup>12,13</sup> while it remains uncertain in Western countries due to the high educational offers. More than the concept of general value of a single webinar, it would be more important to ask: “What benefits do webinars offer you?”. National and international scientific societies must probably start from this point of view and try to regulate the number and type of webinars, in order to avoid a paradox effect. One solution may be to prepare an evaluating format (possibly certified and common for each scientific society) with a numerical score, to assess its relevancy in the scientific scenario. In this way a scientific committee may better regulate the number of webinars as well as its educational role.

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