

The Global Trainee Hosts the Virtual Multi-header – Embracing Technology in Pathology Education

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To the editor: The magic of sitting at a multi-headed microscope and peering down at a glass slide while I listened to the rich discourse between the trainee and the consultant on the subtleties of architecture and form is what drew me to the field of pathology as a medical student. This practice of “double/multi-heading” is the essence of experiential learning in histopathology. It is the equivalent of the Oslerian practice of clinical bedside teaching and allows the learner to gradually acquire visual diagnostic expertise over time.

It is unfortunate then that the onset of the global pandemic at the turn of the decade rendered “double/multi-heading” untenable, due to concerns about spread of infection over close interaction [1]. Moreover, pauses to medical education such as suspension of medical student elective postings and changes to the healthcare workforce such as redeployment to the frontline and work-from-home arrangements have left conventional methods of teaching and learning impractical.

Relative to other clinical specialities, however, histopathology is a predominantly visual subject and is therefore versatile to digitisation. Out of this, a growing community of educators, trainees and students advocating for the use of modern technology in teaching and learning pathology has emerged. At my institution, tele-education was swiftly adopted and optimised, with results of a survey showing high rates of satisfaction and comparability to conventional modes of teaching [2]

Medical student elective postings have similarly been virtualised. *PathElective*, a web-based platform run by a team of pathologists, fellows, residents and medical students, has recently been established to facilitate access to a virtual interactive medical student elective posting in pathology. Over a short span of

time, it received participation from users in 99 countries, with high user ratings of satisfaction and usefulness [3]. Today, a medical student anywhere in the world can register for the experience, at any time, without any cost.

With appropriate anonymisation and sensitivity, teaching and learning can take place on social media platforms as well. The use of Twitter for pathology education (#PathTwitter) has flourished over the pandemic, in the form of bite-sized Tweetorials, Twitter journal clubs, research collaborations and more [4]. Trainee-authored contributions on this space is evident in the nominee shortlists of the #PathTweetAward, a crowd-sourced initiative to recognise outstanding educational contributions to the pathology community on Twitter.

Ultimately, it is remarkable how quickly this pandemic has urged us to adapt. Today, anyone with a smartphone can choose to take ownership of his/her/their training and be a global trainee that hosts the “virtual multi-header”. This is the story of continuing medical education in pathology during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disclosure Statement

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