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Medical education: COVID-19 and surgery

Editor


The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have a major impact on surgical practice, with guidance within hospitals needed urgently¹. However, recommendation is also required for surgical placements within medical schools. The surgical placement is an important contributing factor that helps nurture student interest in a surgical career.

As things stand, medical schools have withdrawn their students from all clinical placements to mitigate transmission of the virus². We fear that this situation, compounded by the already limited time devoted to surgical placements within the medical curriculum, may hinder surgical education and inevitably reduce student interest in pursuing a surgical career. Studies demonstrate the significance of a positive experience

of surgical rotations on future career choices³. Indeed, there has been declining interest in surgery among UK medical students⁴, and this pandemic may serve to hasten this trend.

There is a clear need for social distancing, and this is the most effective mitigative measure until a vaccine or antiviral medication is found. As such, much of teaching has already transitioned to an online platform. However, surgery is an art that can only be perfected in the operating theatre. Learning about the various instruments involved, the roles of the multidisciplinary team, and the steps that clinicians take throughout the patient journey to ensure patient safety, is best experienced. Passive learning through books will undoubtedly place students at a disadvantage.

It may well be time to reform the medium of delivering surgical education. Use of tele-technology as well as augmented reality, whereby students can witness live proctoring by surgeons and interact remotely for a more immersive experience, can revolutionize surgical training⁵. In the short term, this may be a useful solution but as the lockdown restrictions ease, this can be used to supplement student placements which should continue where possible, in accordance with public health policy.

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- 2 Mian A, Khan S. Medical education during pandemics: a UK perspective. *BMC Med* 2020; **18**: 100.
- 3 Marshall DC, Saliccioli JD, Walton SJ, Pitkin J, Shalhoub J, Malietzis G. Medical student experience in surgery influences their career choices: a systematic review of the literature. *J Surg Educ* 2015; **72**: 438–445.
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