

Association of Surgeons in Training Prize Session

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[O017 The virtual surgical specialty series: a platform for undergraduate surgical exposure during the pandemic](#)

Z Hinchcliffe, R Remsudeen

School of Medicine, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Introduction: COVID-19 drastically disrupted medical education, with large proportions of teaching now delivered virtually. It is often challenging to replace face-to-face clinical placements, reducing student exposure to different specialities. The Surgical Specialty Series was created to provide a holistic understanding of various sub-specialities while restrictions to surgical placements existed. This study aimed to investigate the efficacy of our series in improving exposure and interest to surgical careers during the pandemic.

Methods: The series was delivered between October-May 2020/21, covering seven surgical specialties. Each month, three webinars were delivered by surgeons (varying grades), focussing on career pathways, post-graduate teaching and undergraduate revision. All sessions were advertised using social media and delivered via Zoom using online teaching tools (polls, screen-sharing, surgical videos). A feedback form was distributed for data analysis.

Results: The series saw 1124 total attendees (38–107 per webinar): 29.2% were from the home university, 25.9% were from other UK-based institutions and 44.8% were from overseas. Overall, a 21.6% increase was observed in student interest to pursue a surgical career. Although 24.2% of attendees were unsure beforehand, 13.4% developed a surgical interest after. Interactive polls and videos were reported most useful and enjoyable in student learning.

Conclusion: The virtual series was an effective alternative to in-person clinical attachments in raising awareness and undergraduate interest in surgery, despite COVID-19. It was beneficial in widening access to quality medical education, particularly to students overseas. Successes of this series should be considered when shaping the future of undergraduate surgical education in the ongoing pandemic.

Take-home message: The online webinar series was an effective alternative to in-person clinical attachments, through increasing surgical interest amongst medical students. Successes of this series should be considered when shaping the future of undergraduate surgical education in the ongoing pandemic.