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Bedside teaching from a distance; surgical education in the COVID era, a randomised control trial

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Introduction: The COVID pandemic resulted in a shutdown of facilities and resources globally. With drastic changes in the provision of services available in the health sector, so too were medical students' provision of learning. With the onslaught of COVID and the need for ongoing learning resources for students, novel methods to maintain adequate surgical patient exposure and student interaction on a platform amenable to the interactive format required was devised using a virtual platform to compliment current pedagogical approaches.

Methods: This was a randomised control trial to evaluate the perceived use of remote learning in place of surgical bedside teaching in the COVID-19 era. Medical students in a regional hospital were recruited and randomised to undergo the bedside teaching in person or receive the teaching virtually through a Xpert eye, smart glasses to facilitate connections remotely. Feedback questionnaires and exit interviews carried out following each session. Content analysis of transcripts was performed to evaluate the presence and quality of perceived learning, benefits and limitations.

Results: Feedback demonstrated greater engagement, satisfaction, involvement and learning ($p < 0.01$) in the bedside teaching group. Content analysis yielded three main themes; Interpersonal content, technological features, and provision of content. Students reported the virtual teaching was an acceptable alternative in the current climate of social distancing and reduced patient access.

Conclusion: The current pandemic poses a risk to adequate patient exposure to patient centred learning. Teaching sessions received remotely are an acceptable alternative in the current climate of reduced clinical access, however bedside teaching remains the preferred method of learning.