

Medical education in COVID-19 times

"Disruptions to education, economic uncertainty, loss or lack of employment opportunities, impacts on physical and mental health, and trauma from domestic violence to name a few"- @DrTedros #COVID19 – World Health Organization. Dec 14, 2020^[1].

Dear Editor,

Singh *et al.*^[2] assess Indian medical students' perspectives on online modes of education in their original article published on July 22, 2022 in a journal. They made an online survey of medical students at a premier institute, prepared their results in the form of two tables therein, and suggest measures for improving the quality of online classes from medical students' viewpoint. The novel coronavirus pandemic is the epic disaster of our times or perhaps of once in a century and upended the educational schedule of students around the world. As the pandemic drags on and we are entering the fourth consecutive year of the educational session, it will have a long-lasting impact and its effects will be manifested when the school generation enters the job market. Nevertheless, few researchers such as these ones at the Institute of National Importance are visualizing the pandemic in real time through their unique angle, making a dialogue with learners, receiving their challenges with keenness and bidirectional engagement, and suggesting few solutions and the efforts need to be lauded by us.

However, there are a few observations in the educational survey which I am unable to reconcile with. Under a heading of 'Results', the authors state that the minimum age for (undertaking) the survey was 18 years. However, a cursory look at its website indicates that the minimum age one should have to be eligible for the entrance test is 17 years.^[3] Many students who qualify the test in their first attempt are likely not to have attained adulthood. Therefore, the point should be taken into account when assessing the scholars.

Under the heading : *Exploration of online classes*, first sub-section, there is *technical and connectivity glitches*. Here, under *Internet connectivity issues*, the authors discover that close to 20% cohort of students face 'limited net data' challenge. However, for this purpose, now service providers offer data vouchers.^[4] When one exhausts one's data pack of a day because of any reason, one can purchase another data pack (voucher) according to one's needs at any time and anywhere. Hence, whether the students are aware of the plan offered by the companies, I wonder.

Then under the heading of *Health Repercussion*, the investigators find that among ill physical effects of the digital mode of education, 'Eye straining' figures among the most common ones. Here, I want to draw their attention to the fact that that is a known adverse effect.^[5] Moreover, radiation emitted from electronic devices may affect their users' eyes in a harmful way. What I want to underscore is that as they are young students, some of whom may not be aware of the phenomenon, there should be a discussion highlighting the science of ergonomics about the issue. Human beings by their design face difficulty to grasp the intangible – something which is not obvious – and the fact complicates the issue.^[6]

As the effect may be there in the future, they may underestimate it. Here are some tips to get rid of digital eye strain with easy and expert-approved ways.^[7] As the blue light emitted by the electronic gadgets may affect the sleep pattern and affect our circadian rhythm, observation of appropriate sleep hygiene is essential even otherwise. When the pandemic forces us to use the devices more than ever, it is more essential to do so. Then some students were absent from online classes as reported here. However, the beauty of digital technology is anytime learning, and the feature should be exploited for maximizing the benefit. Now, technology exists to record a lecture and share it either openly or on an intranet of a system. Now, reasons exist to explore the feature. PowerPoint presentation too may be shared with a class. The feature may overcome bandwidth difficulty.

When humanity faces challenges thrown upon us by forces of nature, the solution too lies somewhere. Only we should discover it, apply it, and share it with fellow human beings. At the end of the day, besides discovering issues plaguing newcomers in pursuit of their academics, we would simultaneously share ways and means to alleviate them. The Digital Revolution emerged in the last quarter of the last century and progressed in leaps and bounds. It connected us as never before and took all of us on the web. During the early phase of the pandemic, when not much was known about the mutated virus and schools/colleges were closed, it came to our rescue to enforce our bonds using radio waves and made it possible to have a conversation when physical meeting was not possible.

Like every new technology, this one too came with its teething troubles. Nonetheless, when counting those ones, we would have in the back of our minds that no solution is perfect and we are capable of fixing many of these with camaraderie, mutual cooperation, sharing of wisdom, and human ingenuity.

With unprecedented expansion of medical education in the 21st century, several new AIIMS are in pipeline while several others are functioning.^[8] Under these emerging circumstances,

AIIMS New Delhi should take a lead to pay attention to students across the board studying in all these institutes and listen to them and not to theirs alone enrolled within physical boundaries of their campus. That process may yield some deep insight, unmitigated concerns, novel solutions, original ideas, abstract thinking of the human mind, and, above all, a future path which may aspire us to find the best course. A student anywhere is a future workforce, and it is the duty of the current generation to voice their genuine concerns as the authors did here. As the investigators work at the oldest institute of its kind, it should provide overarching umbrella to newcomers in the field and medical community will be indebted for their service.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Harish Gupta

Department of Medicine, KG's Medical University, Lucknow,
UP, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. Harish Gupta,
Department of Medicine, KG's Medical University, Lucknow, UP,
India.

E-mail: harishgupta@kgmcindia.edu

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Received: 14-08-2022

Revised: 01-10-2022

Accepted: 08-10-2022

Published: 17-03-2023

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:

www.jfmpc.com

DOI:

10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_1618_22

How to cite this article: Gupta H. Medical education in COVID-19 times. *J Family Med Prim Care* 2023;12:594-5.

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