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A commentary on “Medical student engagement with surgery and research during the COVID-19 pandemic: Supporting the future workforce for post-pandemic surgical recovery”

Dear Editor,

We have read with great interest the article recently published by student audit and research in surgery (STARSurG) Collaborative et al. [1], entitled "Medical student engagement with surgery and research during the COVID-19 pandemic: Supporting the future workforce for post-pandemic surgical recovery", which exposes the concern about the loss of student exposure to surgical procedures and research as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the drastic change of thought about the desire to study a surgical specialty. Therefore, it seems important to add some comments on this problem that replicates in Latin American countries and more specifically in Colombia.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, and due to its great speed of spread, on March 19 of the same year the government of the Republic of Colombia before the health alert decrees a national curfew [2]. Therefore, every educational complex had to close.

Currently in Colombia there are 58 medical schools, which according to the latest report of the “Asociación Colombiana de Facultades de Medicina (ASCOFAME)”, per year 9,605 students are admitted to the first semester and that in total there would be an approximate of 90,979 medical students in the country [3]. Taking into account the previous context, we can deduce the magnitude of the problem generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, having to send students to their homes and even more serious, some faculties did not have technological platforms that could respond to the new virtual demand.

However, the “Asociación Colombiana de Cirugía (ASCOL)” created the chapter of future surgeons, which became an academic strength for medical students interested in surgical specialties, strengthening interest groups and research seedbeds in surgery, creating manuals and weekly academic content, which included topics of importance in general surgery, such as basic concepts in research and epidemiology [4,5].

Although there were problems, we also want to emphasize the technological advance and rapid response in the creation of virtual platforms that allowed the connection of students with their teachers, in addition to the use of new methodological and pedagogical techniques with the aim of maintaining academic excellence. In the same way, ties with foreign universities were strengthened, with which keynote talks were held reciprocally.

We thank the authors for such evidence and consider it of great importance to replicate this type of survey in order to know the student's perception of medical surgical specialties during the time of COVID – 19.

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All authors equally contributed to the analysis and writing of the manuscript.

Guarantor

GA Domínguez – Alvarado, Epidemiólogo, Docente, Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga, director Grupo de Innovación e Investigación Quirúrgica (GIIC). Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia. Email: Gdominguez@unab.edu.co.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Claudia Andrea Cuervo Duque
 Medica General, Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga, Floridablanca,
 Santander, Colombia
 E-mail address: ccuervo@unab.edu.co.

Álvaro Manuel Manosalva Mugno, Oscar Manuel Labrador Labrador
Médico General, Universidad de Santander, Floridablanca, Santander,
Colombia
E-mail address: almanmug95@gmail.com (Á.M. Manosalva Mugno).

Gonzalo Andrés Domínguez-Alvarado*
Médico, Especialista Epidemiología, Docente, Universidad Autónoma de
Bucaramanga, Grupo de innovación e investigación Quirúrgica (GIIQ),
Floridablanca, Santander, Colombia

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: gdominguez@unab.edu.co (G.A. Domínguez-Alvarado).