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Commentary



A Commentary on “COVID-19 impact on Surgical Training and Recovery Planning (COVID-STAR) - A cross-sectional observational study”

Dear Editor,

We have read with great interest the article published by COVID-STAR Collaborative Study Group et al. [1] titled “COVID-19 impact on Surgical Training and Recovery Planning (COVID-STAR) - A cross-sectional observational study”, where the authors conducted a survey study involving 810 participants, including surgical specialists and medical professionals/students, to assess the impact of COVID-19 on surgical training. The authors found that 69.5% of respondents reported complete loss of surgical training, and 67.3% lost contact with patients, so that a catastrophic negative impact on participants could be perceived. It was also observed that a percentage reported the idea of abandoning medicine (3.3%) and cancelling participation in apprenticeship programs (60%). We thank the authors for presenting us with the harsh reality that academic surgery is experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we would like to make some comments.

Of the respondents, only 3.7% (30) of the respondents were medical students [1], one of the most affected and vulnerable populations within medicine due to the current public calamity [2,3]. Studies have found overwhelming difficulties with respect to the development of medical careers due to the abrupt change from face-to-face to virtual, especially in those regions where there is no access to internet, poor quality, and high levels of poverty, so students do not have a computer [4,5]. Not to mention that due to the financial crisis around the world, many students have had to abandon their studies to work and contribute financially to their families. Those who have managed to adapt have cancelled clinical electives and abandoned research projects [2]. For those who aspire to surgical residencies, the lack of surgical training, participation in medical rounds, restriction in campus access to practice with simulators, among many other situations, will influence the decision to apply for a surgical specialty, knowing that the protocols and challenges are very strict [6–8]. However, there is no current evidence to predict the medium- and long-term effect of COVID-19 on surgical training and skill development in medical students aspiring to surgical residency. In this order of ideas, it is also necessary to carry out an international collaboration to estimate the impact, prognosis and perception of surgical training and academic course during the period of pandemic and post-pandemic COVID-19 of medical students, in order to accurately determine the training gap of medical students, who will be the future surgeons among the different regions of the world. Likewise, identify and verify if the barriers described years ago persist or evolved [9], hindering the design and implementation of policies in universities and hospitals, in order to give more activities and responsibilities to the medical student, to complement the gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If such multicenter results are achieved, the best actions

can be defined based on the sociodemographic, economic, educational and health characteristics of each particular region.

Data statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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

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Declaration of competing interest

All authors declare that there exist no commercial or financial relationships that could, in any way, lead to a potential conflict of interest.

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