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Perspectives

Podcasts, the pandemic, and a paradigm shift in medical careers

Cheng-Feng Chu ^{a,b,†}, Chia-Chi Chang ^{b,†}, Yu-Hsuan Lin ^{c,d,*}

^a Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Keelung, Taiwan

^b MedStudio, Taipei, Taiwan

^c Institute of Population Health Sciences, National Health Research Institutes, Zhunan, Miaoli County, Taiwan

^d Department of Psychiatry, National Taiwan University Hospital, Taipei, Taiwan

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The COVID-19 pandemic, by disrupting traditional in-person learning, has changed the ways in continuing medical education. Podcasts have become popular media for learning because these episodic, downloadable audio files are available anytime and anywhere, which is convenient for medical trainees, who tend to have irregular and long work hours. Although several high-quality medical education podcasts exist, such as NEJM Resident 360, one devoted specifically devoted to medical career development is rare. Medpersona is the first podcast program in Mandarin that interviews people with conventional or innovative medical careers,¹ providing a broad vision on a weekly update basis. Since the launch of Medpersona on February 16, 2020, during the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, 58 episodes, averaging 68.4 min each (± 15.7 min), have been released; this length allows the interviews to be comprehensive and thorough. The podcast has already covered all 23 medical specialties defined by Taiwan's Ministry of Health and Welfare, and has focused on the opinion and experiences of medical workers, including those at academic medical centers (30.2%), at regional hospitals

(20.9%), at local hospitals (2.3%), at private clinics (23.2%), in remote or isolated areas where the physician population ratio less than 1:4300 (2.3%), in government public health offices (2.3%), and in non-medical settings (18.6%).

The content and performance of the Medpersona podcast demonstrate the current medical career paradigm shift. Out of the 43 interviewees with medical specialists during our study period, 13 (30.2%) have cross-disciplinary specialties or work experience beyond being a medical doctor, such in law, travel blogging, or management in a pharmaceutical company. The total downloads within 30 days of an episode's release were significantly higher for interviewees with cross-disciplinary experience ($N = 13$) (4888 ± 2911) than those for interviewees with a conventional medical career ($N = 30$) (3079 ± 1005 , $p = 0.048$). In addition, the three most-downloaded episodes highlight cross-disciplinary specialties or working experiences, further suggesting a paradigm shift in medical careers. These three episodes respectively featured Dr. Yi-Ning Su, an obstetrician and entrepreneur; Dr. Daniel Tsung-Ning Huang, a pediatric infectious specialist who makes frequent appearances on traditional and social media; and Dr. Kung Hsiang-Chi, an infectious disease specialist famed in Taiwan and elsewhere as a travel blogger.

Dr. Huang, a pediatrician, has become a role model for many through his embrace of the digital era. Being aware of the complexity of social dynamics amplified through mass media might rapidly escalate to levels beyond the medical

* Corresponding author. 35 Keyan Road, Zhunan, Miaoli County 35053, Taiwan.

E-mail address: yhsuanlin@nhri.edu.tw (Y.-H. Lin).

[†] Cheng-Feng Chu and Chia-Chi Chang contributed equally to this work.

professionals can handle, the audience could hear Dr. Huang's complete story about leading a professional team that places content he develops on multiple media outlets, such as conventional television shows, a YouTube channel, a blog, and several social media systems. His prompt feedback to parents and provision of comprehensive information to potential patients have made him extremely popular.

The infectious disease specialist, Dr. Kung, is a key opinion leader due to his travel blog (<https://linshibi.com>), which has had more than 100 million views. During the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, Kung began sharing both travel information and perspectives on infectious disease in several countries. Kung continues to provide up-to-date information on COVID-19 on his blog and podcast. As a full-time blogger and medical information provider, Kung has not only gained nationwide attention, but also highlight the importance of professional management on new media.

Medpersona has filled an unmet need for Mandarin speakers in medical fields who seek inspiration for career development. Most continuing medical education should be remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and medical students and trainees have had fewer opportunities to receive mentorship or other instruction from medical role models. Since Medpersona was launched in February 2020, its downloads and views within 30 days of release have risen significantly, reaching 12,838 for the latest career-related episode. Our survey found that 56.3% of listeners were postgraduate trainees and residents, who typically must work excessively: 70.6–90.9 h per week.^{2,3} While podcasts have been revolutionary for medical education, the COVID-19 pandemic has given this technology a more prominent role.⁴ Of note, Medpersona is organized and hosted by only two people: a surgery resident trainee and a co-host with a background in education policy and startups, both of whom have full-time jobs. This financial independence allows

Medpersona to present viewpoints on medical careers in an unbiased manner.

Medpersona has set the standard for medical podcasts on career development in the Mandarin-speaking world. Its model not only exemplifies the role of audio-based media in medical education, — especially during the pandemic, with this era's quarantines and social distancing — but also reflects the paradigm shift concerning the possible shape of medical careers in the near future. However, medical trainees have to note that the rising new media during covid-19 pandemic, like Medpersona podcast, would cause people to spend less time interacting face-to-face, which is still an irreplaceable part of medical education.

Declaration of competing interest

We declare that Medpersona is produced by MedStudio, which is self-funded by the two co-first authors, C.F.Chu and C.C.Chang.

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