

Low-cost or free access virtual platforms utility in placenta accreta spectrum



TO THE EDITORS: We read with interest the article by Ahmadzia et al,¹ in which they interestingly analyze the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on a scientific society, seeking to increase its international representation. The authors highlight the importance of virtual activities in the current world situation and how face-to-face scientific events must be reinvented. Quite probably, from now on, they must provide a hybrid interface if they seek to increase their audience.

Physicians from low- and middle-income countries have been experiencing difficulties with international-travel arrangements (even between regions in the same country) for quite some time when going to annual meetings and/or training opportunities. Economic limitations and the reduced interest of institutions for interinstitutional referencing processes or continuing medical education limit the opportunities for face-to-face interaction of low-middle income countries (LMIC) professionals. Placenta accreta spectrum (PAS) is an infrequent disease, with few hospitals recognized as reference centers for its treatment² and with a very limited educational offering, worldwide. Latin America is one of the regions with the highest frequency of births by cesarean delivery. Here, the possibility of dying from PAS is a reality with high stakes for the affected population.³

From January 2021, virtuality has governed educational activities and international interactions throughout the world. The Latin American group for the study of Placenta Accreta Spectrum (PAS LatAm) was assembled as an option to share information, bring together Spanish-speaking professionals interested in PAS, promote collaborative research, and

facilitate the diagnosis and surgical treatment of patients affected by this disease in the region (Table 1).

Ahmadzia et al rightly point out that the global pandemic has created an opportunity to make conferences more equitable and accessible to all.¹ Very few health professionals today do not have a smartphone, and there are various low-cost or free applications that facilitate immediate communication by text or video. PAS LatAm recognizes the shortage of hospitals trained for the care of PAS in our region². It also recognizes the importance of immediate access to information in our language in a way that facilitates carrying out educational and healthcare-related activities around PAS, which are clearly perceived as useful by our members (Table 2).

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized education and medical practice,⁴ and though formal telemedicine activities require the construction of agreements and formal interaction processes between hospitals, the diversity of regulations in each country and the reduced interest in these types of activities at the institutional level delay the use of “formal telemedicine.” An immediate usable option is “telehelp,” a term used for fast or “informal” virtual interactions between medical groups when talking about healthcare problems, and whose usefulness has been described in the management of PAS⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that the usefulness of ICTs is much broader than was previously thought. The mandatory nature of virtual interaction during the pandemic (as a way of limiting face-to-face interaction) made many medical colleagues more receptive to the use of ICTs and increased the desire of learning how to use them. PAS

TABLE 1

The Latin American group for the study of Placenta Accreta Spectrum academic and healthcare-related activities facilitated by low-cost or free access virtual platforms (number of activities)

Monthly PAS conferences by PAS LatAm members ^a		12
Dissemination of international and national webinars ^b		52
Dissemination of collaborative research opportunities ^b		7
Abstracts in international annual meetings ^b		10
Papers in scientific journals ^b		3
Clinical cases discussion	Ultrasonography images ^b	35
	Surgery images ^b	25
Joint planning of surgical procedures at local hospitals ^a		8
Telepresence of an expert during PAS surgery ^a		5

IQR, interquartile range; *PAS*, placenta accreta spectrum; *PAS LatAm*, The Latin American group for the study of Placenta Accreta Spectrum.

^a Activity facilitated by Microsoft Teams; ^b Activity facilitated by WhatsApp.

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TABLE 2**The Latin American group for the study of Placenta Accreta Spectrum members' opinion on the usefulness of low-cost or free access virtual platforms as networking facilitators^a**

With what score between 1 and 10 do you rate the usefulness of PAS LatAm group chat interaction in your professional practice? (1 being no use and 10 extremely useful), median (IQR)		10 (9–10)
What benefits has participating in the group chat of PAS LatAm brought to you?	Participate in research activities, n (%)	36 (66.6)
	Receive and issue opinions on clinical cases in other hospitals, n (%)	42 (77.7)
	Learn new surgical techniques, n (%)	43 (79.6)
	Establish contact with other colleagues interested in PAS, n (%)	47 (87)
	Participate in academic activities of the group, n (%)	50 (92.6)
	Receive information about academic activities on PAS from other groups, n (%)	46 (85.2)
	No benefit, n (%)	0 (0)
Do you think that WhatsApp chat is a sufficient tool to establish an initial academic interaction around PAS?	It's enough, n (%)	10 (18.5)
	It is partially sufficient, n (%)	33 (61.1)
	It is insufficient, more complex academic platforms are needed, n (%)	11 (20.4)

IQR, interquartile range; LC/F-VP, low-cost or free access virtual platforms; PAS, placenta accreta spectrum; PAS LatAm, The Latin American group for the study of Placenta Accreta Spectrum.

^a Survey conducted on August 29 and 30. Overall, 54 responses (11 countries) were obtained from 72 members of PAS LatAm surveyed; 47 individuals (87% of those surveyed) claim to attend regularly (more than 4 cases a year) patients with PAS.

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LatAm agrees with Ahmadzia et al that the COVID-19 pandemic has left us an opportunity of growth for scientific societies, with increased opportunities for training, networking, and mentoring (Table 2). Taking advantage of this opportunity in the context of PAS in LMIC must be accompanied by the possibility of quickly including interested professionals (without a large number of requirements and with reduced costs) and the use of easily accessible and widely disseminated virtual platforms. ■

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