

Undergraduate ophthalmology teaching in COVID-19 times: Students' perspective and feedback

Dear Editor:

We read with great interest articles on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting ophthalmic training and compelling us to look at newer platforms of teaching.^[1-3] Undergraduate ophthalmology teaching is an important part of MBBS curriculum as it forms the basis of ophthalmic knowledge of the physician of first contact in the community.^[4] It also forms the fundamental basis of future ophthalmology training if pursued at post graduate level. Unfortunately, undergraduate ophthalmology teaching also had to bear the brunt of the pandemic due to the sudden discontinuation of teaching classes. To ensure that the students would not lose precious time and could continue with their academics during the lockdown, our college has shifted to online teaching of undergraduate students.

Our college has an education management system (EMS) on the college website which can be accessed by the students with his/her unique ID. The ophthalmology lecture scheduled for that day was uploaded in PowerPoint format on the EMS. While making the presentation, we tried to highlight the salient points and include clinical scenarios and photographs to make it interesting for the students and to encourage them to read further on that particular topic. In addition, a WhatsApp group of all the class students along with the ophthalmology faculty was created. Reference material and related videos of clinical examination and surgical procedures were shared in this group and the students were encouraged to clear any doubts regarding the topic on this platform. Simultaneously, a Google form of 10 multiple-choice questions (MCQs) on the topic uploaded was designed and was shared on the WhatsApp group which was to be filled within 1 day. This served a dual purpose of ensuring that the students were reading the study material provided in a

time-bound manner and also as formative assessment to gauge the student understanding of the topic.

Feedback from the students was taken regarding their perception of online classes. 97.2% students felt that online classes were a viable alternative to classroom lectures in the current scenario. 84.7% of the students were familiar with online teaching platform as they had undertaken online coaching classes earlier. The main advantages as perceived by the students were: Ease of access anytime (24.7%), from anywhere (17.6%), the material could be read at any pace (12.9%), as many times (8.2%), with the comfort of accessing reference material simultaneously (7.1%). 17.6% students felt that the MCQs helped them in self-assessment. The main disadvantages as perceived by the students were that this mode of teaching was not as interactive as classroom lectures (60%), and doubts could not be cleared instantaneously (29.4%). The main hurdle faced by the students was poor Internet connectivity (85.7%) or nonavailability of device to access the study material (7.2%).

In conclusion, we feel that the challenges in education posed by the COVID-19 pandemic should be treated by us as an opportunity to explore new and innovative teaching-learning techniques which could shape the nature of medical education as we currently know it. Though the platform of online teaching is not a substitute for clinical and practical learning in any way, and is not without its shortcomings, it is helping the students carry on with their academics in these uncertain times.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.ijo.in
	DOI: 10.4103/ijo.IJO_1689_20

Cite this article as: Sud R, Sharma P, Budhwar V, Khanduja S. Undergraduate ophthalmology teaching in COVID-19 times: Students' perspective and feedback. *Indian J Ophthalmol* 2020;68:1490-1.

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