

The New Normal of Medical Education - Challenges and Opportunities

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Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Medical Education worldwide has seen some remarkable changes. The digital transformation already seen in Medical Education has progressed rapidly and the profound effect of the current situation may have an everlasting impact on how future doctors are educated (Rose, 2020). Social distancing will be the new norm as it is the most effective preventive strategy pending an effective treatment or the development of a vaccine or both (Del Rio & Malani 2020). This is indeed a transformative juncture to learn and apply new methods and practices.

The advancement of Medical Education in this setting through curricular innovation is a seminal moment for many disciplines in medicine. These are challenging times for low to middle-income countries due to financial constraints coupled with a lack of human and infrastructural resources (Karunathilake, 2017). However, in this backdrop, Sri Lankan Medical Faculties have specially weathered the storm and have managed to continue the academic programmes while overcoming challenges posted by resource constraints. There are many lessons to be learned from universities spread across the island on how to successfully implement and transform Medical Education from one that is conventional to one that is more digitally enabled.

Making the Transition

Strong advocacy and guidelines put forth by the University Grants Commission Sri Lanka, enabled a swift transition from traditional learning methods to online learning platforms. A clear institutional strategy was therefore fundamental to making this transition (Bediang *et al.*, 2013). However, it should be emphasized that this was not a mere conversion of the traditional paper-based method to one that is digital (Masic, 2008). During a pandemic such as this, importance had to be given to ensuring the safety of staff and all other stakeholders, which was the premise for closing the medical schools and moving teaching to digital platforms (Sahi, *et al.*, 2020). Programs needed to be implemented and evaluated while migrating the risk of contracting COVID-19 by students and staff members, especially during clinical rotations as they could become a portal of the spread of the infection (Del Rio, & Malani, 2020). In response to the current needs, many clinical departments have come up with innovative plans to avoid overcrowding during

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4038/seajme.v14i1.241>



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