Adapting to Change: A Narrative Review of Medical Education Transformation Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Teresita E. Chiu, Gracia Niña R. Bongabong, Jacklyn Risia D. San Gabriel

College of Medicine
Cebu Doctors' University

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted medical education, forcing institutions worldwide to rapidly adapt to unprecedented challenges. This review examines the impact of the pandemic on medical education, highlighting the shift from traditional methods to online and remote learning. It discusses the challenges faced, such as reduced clinical exposure and the need for innovative teaching strategies, and how institutions responded by integrating technology and adopting new educational approaches. Key findings reveal that while technology has enhanced accessibility and time management, issues like digital fatigue and the loss of hands-on clinical experiences persist. The review emphasizes the need for ongoing evaluation of these adaptive strategies and calls for more localized studies to address region-specific challenges. Frameworks such as inquiry, pattern recognition, and Adaptive Action are suggested as tools for navigating these complex issues. The insights from this review aim to guide educators, policymakers, and institutions in shaping a more resilient and adaptable medical education system for the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, medical education, challenges in medical education

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled educational institutions, including medical schools, to rapidly transition from traditional campus learning to online formats, challenging educators to devise effective strategies for remote student engagement (Zayapragassarazan, 2020; Masic,

2008). A thorough examination of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on medicine and health education was carried out by Gardanova et al. in 2023. The study revealed that the pandemic significantly disrupted various aspects of healthcare delivery and health professions education, resulting in heightened anxiety and distress among students and professionals due to rapid changes in educational delivery methods. This crisis revealed many weaknesses within public health systems, medical education frameworks, and political structures (Sklar, 2020). The virus's highly contagious nature made it challenging to conduct lectures as usual, impacting the medical education process, which had relied heavily on both traditional classroom instruction and online learning modalities. Educators were tasked with finding innovative ways to deliver lectures safely while ensuring the quality and continuity of education amidst these unprecedented challenges (Alsoufi et al., 2020). As a result, conventional methods of instruction and evaluation quickly moved to online platforms, utilizing social media, video conferencing, and virtual or augmented reality technology.

The pandemic led to reduced patient care for non-COVID-19 cases, limiting bedside teaching opportunities for medical students (Alsoufi et al., 2020). As a result, students were unable to complete their clerkships (Calhoun et al., 2020). Clinical rotations for medical training had been suspended (Akers et al., 2020). The immediate advantages of these adjustments include better time management, more accessibility, and the promotion of self-directed learning, even though their long-term efficacy is still unknown. With technological difficulties and the rise of digital weariness, the lack of real clinical encounters and patient engagement remains a significant worry (Remtulla, 2020).

Medical education's global concerns are discussed in this narrative review, contextualizing them as problems that defy easy fixes and are viewed differently in different parts of the world. The review suggests three straightforward but efficient strategies to overcome these obstacles: inquiry, pattern recognition, and Adaptive Action. These tactics are offered to medical educators to tackle obstacles and guide flexible approaches.

Even though transformative measures are widely used, more material that address the local setting are still needed. These adaptive alterations' immediate and long-term impacts also need further investigation. This review aims to give educators and policymakers a basic grasp of the adaptive activities implemented nationally and locally in medical education. The study aims to lead current and future activities, contributing to the continual improvement of medical education in the current dynamic context by assessing the extent to which these changes have been implemented.

These studies highlight the COVID-19 pandemic's significant and revolutionary effects on medical education. The lessons learned throughout this global crisis offer invaluable insights for reshaping medical education dynamically and adaptively, from creative adjustments to problems in online learning.

Review and Discussion

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Medical Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted medical education and healthcare systems, forcing institutions worldwide to adapt to unprecedented challenges. Studies by Gardanova et al. (2023), Majumder et al. (2021), Alsoufi et al. (2020), and Sklar (2020) collectively illustrate the transformative effects of the pandemic on medical education, from shifts

to online learning and virtual simulations to the broader implications for health professions training and policy reform. These analyses provide critical insights into how medical education systems have responded to the crisis and highlight the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation to prepare for future pandemics.

A comprehensive examination of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on medicine and health education was conducted by Gardanova et al. (2023). This study primarily focused on the social, psychological, and educational aspects of medical students engaged in online learning during the pandemic and explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education and student well-being. It highlighted the shift to online learning, virtual simulations, and collaboration with health authorities. A survey of 710 Russian medical students revealed high stress (85%) and severe anxiety (61%) due to COVID-19, with fear of infection and social distancing as key stressors. The study suggests curriculum updates, technology use, faculty development, and better student support to improve medical education for future pandemics.

Majumder et al. (2021) discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on radiology education, training, and practice. Their evaluation outlined the challenges posed by the pandemic, such as disruptions to in-person case reviews and instructional sessions. The study examined the educators' efforts to overcome these obstacles through e-learning, interactive lessons, and online platforms. The report contrasts pre-COVID-19 practices with the adaptations made during the pandemic, offering insights into effective modifications in radiology education. The pandemic led to a reduction in in-person clinical case reviews and teaching sessions, as many institutions suspended face-to-face activities. In response, radiology educators shifted to online teaching platforms, incorporating interactive sessions and e-learning to continue instruction. Strategies like virtual case reviews, simulation-based training, and online journal clubs helped mitigate the loss of clinical exposure.

Alsoufi et al. (2020) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education in Libya, focusing on medical students' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of electronic learning. Many students in the study expressed skepticism, pointing to difficulties in adopting e-learning. The findings underscored the need for virtual clinical rotations and online instruction to mitigate the pandemic's impact on medical education. The study concluded with a call for support and commitment to implementing viable alternatives to ensure the continuity of medical education.

Sklar (2020) highlighted the necessity for reform in medical education, healthcare delivery, and health policy based on the experiences during the pandemic. He emphasized the need for innovative approaches in health professions education, such as telemedicine, and underscores the importance of academic journals in sharing new training methods and expert insights.

Collectively, these studies highlight the profound and transformative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education. The insights gained from this global crisis provide crucial guidance for making medical education more dynamic and adaptable, incorporating innovative changes and addressing challenges in online learning.

<u>Rapid Shift to Online and Remote Learning</u>

The COVID-19 pandemic has induced significant challenges in medical education, driving a rapid transition from traditional in-person learning to online formats. This shift posed numerous challenges but also spurred innovative solutions in medical training. The following reviews and

studies provide insights into how educational institutions adapted to these challenges, focusing on online learning strategies, technological advancements, and the impact on both students and educators. Key findings from these studies shed light on the effectiveness of various approaches and offer valuable recommendations for future medical education in a post-pandemic world.

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled educational institutions, including medical schools, to rapidly transition from traditional campus learning to online formats, challenging educators to devise effective strategies for remote student engagement (Zayapragassarazan, 2020; Masic, 2008).

Zayapragassarazan (2020) addressed the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, which prompted a paradigm shift in medical education toward online learning. The paper underscored the need for innovative strategies beyond mere videoconferencing sessions, emphasizing active student engagement through reading, writing, discussing, problem-solving, and creating. The strategies presented aimed to enhance the online learning experience, ensuring the continuity of teaching, learning, and assessment processes during the pandemic.

Masic (2008) explored e-learning as a novel method in medical education, focusing on its role in distance learning and tele-education. The article discussed the varied technologies encompassed by distance learning, including electronic health, telehealth, telematics, telemedicine, and tele-education. It evaluated the status and development of tele-education, emphasizing its integration into biomedical curricula as part of a blended learning strategy. The article concluded by highlighting the impact of tele-education on future medical practice and the importance of recognizing faculty efforts in creating tele-education content.

Ahmady et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review to explore distance learning strategies in medical education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study categorized identified strategies into five themes: Technology-enhanced Learning (TEL), Simulation-based learning, Technology-based clinical education, Mobile learning, and Blended learning. The review revealed that TEL and simulation-based learning were more commonly used during the pandemic, involving online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and virtual clinical cases. The study highlighted the potential of these strategies to enhance learners' knowledge and performance in medical education.

Hilburg et al. (2020) explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education, addressing challenges and adaptations in both undergraduate and graduate medical education. The article discussed creative adaptations, limitations of virtual replication of clinical experiences, engagement challenges over online platforms, and the broader impact on clinical care delivery. It emphasized the need for a thoughtful approach to medical education, considering the well-being of educators and learners while navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Khamees et al. (2022) systematically reviewed remote learning developments in postgraduate medical education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review explored online learning advancements that replaced traditional face-to-face activities, evaluating interventions, outcomes, limitations, and lessons learned. The findings highlighted the prevalence of synchronous activities, the use of technology by teachers to replace traditional practices, and positive outcomes regarding reactions, attitudes, knowledge, and skills. The review provided practical recommendations for optimizing online learning in a post-pandemic world.

<u>Challenges faced and creating Adaptive Action</u>

With significant challenges in medical education, institutions worldwide have been prompted to rapidly adapt. The systematic review by Tan et al. (2022) investigated the challenges and innovations in undergraduate medical education during this period, highlighting the shift to remote learning as a key focus. In response, institutions swiftly integrated technology to replace face-to-face activities, with international and national collaboration playing a crucial role in developing and implementing adaptive strategies. The prevalence of synchronous activities underscored efforts to maintain real-time engagement.

Mennin (2021) identified and explored global "wicked" challenges in medical education, emphasizing their complexity and resistance to straightforward solutions. The Adaptive Action framework—comprising iterative questioning (What? So What? Now What?) to address these challenges effectively, highlighted the importance of incorporating experiential learning methodologies into medical education (Mennin, 2021).

Fontanilla and Guzman (2023) assessed the quality of online learning delivery and the learning management system at the Medical Colleges of Northern Philippines and the International School of Asia and the Pacific. Both the delivery of online learning and the learning management system received positive assessments. A significant relationship was found between the effectiveness of online learning and the quality of the learning management system.

Lazari et al. (2023) explored perspectives on medical education post-COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on experiential student study groups in pathology. The study revealed a strong desire for active learning methodologies, indicating a need for practical skill acquisition. Optional pathology study groups were well-received, suggesting the success of incorporating experiential learning into the curriculum.

Saeki et al. (2023) reviewed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on medical education, focusing on the guidelines and policies implemented in Japan, the USA, the UK, and Australia. The diverse methods employed across these regions reflected varied responses to the common goal of returning students to live education. The review highlighted the need for ongoing collaboration and monitoring as further reports worldwide were anticipated.

Gaur et al. (2020) conducted a narrative review of challenges and opportunities faced by medical schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in transitioning to remote learning for preclinical medical education. Many medical schools successfully adopted remote teaching and new technology-oriented innovations, establishing a new culture of "online home learning,".

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review underscored the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education and the remarkable adaptive actions demonstrated by institutions worldwide. The pandemic has driven a significant shift in teaching and learning methods, revealing a range of challenges from disrupted clinical exposure to the need for innovative strategies.

The adoption of technology, particularly online and remote learning, had been a key response, offering benefits like increased accessibility and better time management. While the immediate benefits included enhanced accessibility and improved time management, concerns

persist regarding the potential loss of authentic clinical experiences and the emergence of digital fatigue. These challenges require ongoing evaluation and refinement of strategies.

The review also points to the need for more localized studies to address region-specific challenges and suggests that frameworks like inquiry, pattern recognition, and adaptive action are crucial for navigating these challenges. It emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and monitoring both short-term and long-term impacts.

As medical education evolves in response to the pandemic, the insights from these studies provide valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and institutions. The lessons learned and technological innovations from this period offer a path towards a resilient and adaptive medical education system in the post-COVID pandemic era.

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