Online Pivot to Support Students' Learning Amid COVID-19

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What problem was addressed ? Amid Covid-19 colleges and universities are closed down, reorganization of student education raises concerns about timely graduation.[1] Therefore, there is a radical shift across colleges to remote and online teaching models. The current article shares an experience with online teaching at a Medical College located in western India.

What was tried ? During Covid-19 lockdown it was decided by faculties of first professional medical course of the medical college, viz; Anatomy, Physiology & Biochemistry to shift to teaching online for a batch of 200 students. Initially, video-conferencing (VC) call applications like zoom or Team Link were utilized and WhatsApp group was created to inform students regarding topics and time. This ran smoothly to start with and 160-170 participants could join. Within few days, internet connectivity and bandwidth issues started erupting from both the sides, hampering quality of teaching. The teachers then decided to record each session via screen recording software and started uploading the same in dedicated Google Drive, sharing the link via WhatsApp group. Additionally, a dedicated YouTube channel was created for students to download videos to watch as per their convenience. This helped to minimize the challenge faced due to internet connectivity and to safeguard against cyber-attack, likely to prop up with apps like Zoom that uses VC.

To engage students through interaction as in live session (Google-meet), teachers made themselves available on WhatsApp at a fixed time or a live session or by sharing the answers in WhatsApp group either by text, audio file, sharing link of relevant video, animation or by any other best possible way. At the end of series of topics covered (one month), voluntary feedback was obtained from the students through Google form. Out of 171 who offered feedback, 62 % found the online classes to be effective. The limiting factors were; internet connectivity and suitability of timings. 68% found You-tube videos to be the most effective method. To open-ended questions some of the verbatim received were: “Every student doesn't reside in urban area and faces network issues leading to loss”; “Sharing YouTube videos is better than live classes”; “A very big thanks for helping us learn while trying to be interactive as well”. 38% students expressed the need for Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) tests for self - assessment, which could be administered through google forms. Other methods suggested were: small group viva sessions; posting questions papers of previous years; open book exams and once a week MCQ type quiz.

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"What lessons were learned?" Covid-19 pandemic has forced educational uses of online technology. It's learnt that as education is the prime goal, teachers' need to explore, innovate and create effective strategies to teach students online. Assessment in subjects like anatomy might require self-directed virtual patient exercises. We need preparedness, empathetic and sensitive attitude to student's data plan and limitations of weak Wi-Fi connections. Making medical education work for next few months is going to require many sacrifices to continue to help our students to learn, the "goal" we have always had.

References:

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