

COVID-19 IS OVER- LESSONS LEARNED AND UNLEARNT: FROM THE EYE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL EDUCATION OF A MEDICAL SCHOOL

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The latest report issued on 4/5/2023 by the WHO director General about announcing an end to the Covid-19 pandemic is based on the declining reports of new infections, declining hospitalizations and ICU deaths, and an increase in immunization rates throughout the world.¹ During these 3 years, every individual, in any position remained affected. More than 80 million were reportedly infected, more than 1 million died, hundreds of millions of dollars of financial losses incurred, psychological trauma inflicted over innumerable patients and their caregivers, thousands of hours lost in jobs, schools and other duties, educational deadlines for assessments missed, and many more such losses were observed. The WHO`s announcement of ending the Covid-19 emergency might bring new hopes for overcoming these.

From the perspective of educational institutions in general and medical education in particular, the departments involved in organizing the curricular activities faced the most challenges. These included revamping the timetables, changing the assessment schedules, arranging the online teaching activities for the first time, developing faculty and students, and in the meantime, protecting themselves and others from the deadly disease, especially in times when the vaccine was still unavailable.² The most important challenge I faced as the curriculum committee chair, was developing an online platform for the students. We used our customized learning management system for the faculty to upload their teaching material as a first attempt. Then, the faculty was trained to present their teaching content via that platform for a few weeks. After introducing the "ZOOM" platform, a proper interactive channel was established with the students, which also helped us to conduct online assessments. During the first 6 months of the start of the pandemic, most of the faculty was trained in using online platforms for teaching, assessment, and online meetings.

During the pandemic, teachers and students found new ways and means of teaching, learning, and assessments. The faculty also found ways of interacting locally,

regionally, and internationally to communicate with peers, students, and teachers and develop themselves by participating in online educational activities. We also learned how to participate in and conduct online conferences and workshops. Our institution developed policies for awarding and accrediting online CME/CPD hours for faculty and students.

One of the most important aspects of medical students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, was interruptions in their clinical training and research. Many types of assessments were delayed for this purpose, especially, postgraduate exit examinations were delayed for 6-12 months by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP). Many research papers published throughout the world regarding the challenges faced by medical students during the era of the Covid-19 pandemic found that the students felt deficient in learning clinical skills, missed the research deadlines, and got delayed their exit examinations.^{3,4} We do not know, how these deficiencies in their training may have affected their overall competencies when they will be working independently in the communities as clinicians.

The covid-19 pandemic has equipped medical institutions with the alternate system of teaching and training, assessments, and faculty preparedness in times of calamities, and has provided opportunities for students to avail teaching platforms other than those available in their institutions like YouTube, TED, Coursera, and others. It is hoped that in the future, the magnitude of the impact of such calamities will be much less over educational activities than the one we faced recently.

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