

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing education

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Abstract

The current pandemic is comparable to the other historical events, with major challenges to the National Health Service. However, what is much less clear is the impact of COVID-19 on education. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a rapid transition to entirely online teaching for nursing students. As not much is known regarding the long-lasting impact of COVID-19 on education, it is therefore also necessary to record and study the full impact of the changes being made. Despite the pace of this transition, both formal and informal student feedback indicated that students have an extremely high level of satisfaction and engagement with online learning activities

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Nursing education, Online learning, E-learning

1. Introduction

The current pandemic is comparable to the other historical events, with major challenges to the National Health Service. However, what is much less clear is the impact of COVID-19 on education. Already, faculty and students are grappling with the changes that have been made and attempting to consolidate these with their plan of career development. Changes that may seem relatively minor in comparison to the global pandemic have the potential to be drastic turning points in the career progression of many. As not much is known regarding the long-lasting impact of COVID-19 on education, it is therefore also necessary to record and study the full impact of the changes being made.¹³

E-learning is not a new concept, with multiple platforms providing different learning materials, such as eBrain (<http://www.ebrain.net>) and e-learning for healthcare (<https://www.e-lfh.org.uk>). Nonetheless, recently we have experienced a rise in innovative trainers (including peer-to-peer trainers) who are creating new learning materials and/ or holding videoconferences for learners worldwide, using software such as Zoom (<https://zoom.us>).

Perhaps the key learning to be taken out of the crisis is not the clinical facts but the softer skills of leadership, innovation to adapt, and team building. There are three aspects that trainers can focus on during the outbreak (where possible) and more importantly when the outbreak subsides:

1. Preparation of revision materials for trainees who were preparing for their professional examinations.

2. Facilitating practical skills such as operations and clinical procedures (which will require patience and more patience) perhaps supplemented by simulation and technologies such as augmented or virtual reality.

3. Encourage trainees to reflect on what we have learned in this crisis and move forward. Our main focus at the moment is patient care; however, we should not forget about the disruption in our nursing education curriculum and its potential long-term impact.¹

Before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, we had been thinking about how best to re-imagine our university nursing program to enhance the student experience and learning outcomes. Globally, questions have been raised regarding the utility and format of the pre-clinical content taught in nursing programs, particularly lectures, which have increasingly low attendance rates. There is emerging evidence that blended approaches to education meet the connectivity, flexibility, and interactivity expectations of learners and have the potential to combine the best of both online and face-to-face teaching.¹¹

Packaging content in digestible chunks, combined with active learning activities online such as adaptive tutorials, discussions, and reflections, results in more meaningful educational experiences for students than didactic lectures.¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic forced a rapid transition to entirely online teaching for junior nursing students. Even components of clinical teaching (other than physical examination) had to proceed in this format. Despite the pace of this transition, both formal and informal student feedback indicated that students have an extremely high level of satisfaction and engagement with online learning activities.¹¹

Some important aspects of university life, such as friendships, personal identity development, exposure to diversity, and self-care skills, will be much harder to achieve in a solely online environment, but as we develop plans to reintroduce elements of face-to-face teaching, we need to ensure that these are integrated with and informed by, the advances made in education during the past few months.¹

Since March 2020, medical and nursing education in India has experienced a major disruptive change as a consequence of the COVID 19 Pandemic and nationwide lockdown.¹²

Almost all undergraduate students of colleges are relocated to their homes, leaving their hostels just before the beginning of lockdown, of local, interstate, and international travel. Thus, leaving behind routine didactic lecture classes, practical, tutorials, seminars, clinical (ward, the outpatient department [OPD], and (OT) postings and internal assessment examination.¹²

The uncertainty of the situation during this period in the country due to COVID 19 Pandemic has led many colleges and health universities to initiate steps to start teaching and learning using various online platforms on their own, as there were no definitive directives other than the encouragement to initiate the use online teaching methods from either Indian nursing Council (INC) or any other statutory bodies.¹²

All of these teaching/learning tools can be easily accessed, even from mobile devices. Above all, various publishers have started providing free access to e-resources materials, including e-books, e-journals, and databases during this pandemic period. There is a need for multiple studies, to be conducted across the country to know the effectiveness of such teaching and learning tools both from students and nursing

teachers. One positive observation is that technology is being used rapidly and innovatively to keep continuing teaching and learning.

A major challenge for teachers in the present times is to replicate the experience of clinical exposures. These exposures range from OPD and ward postings, where they will have interactive communication with patients and with teachers during case presentation sessions, thus helping in the enhancement of communication and clinical skills. At present, videos, podcasts, simple virtual reality, and computer simulations are beginning to be used to assist teachers and facilitate student learning and training in these areas. Simple online platforms, such as websites and blogs, can provide basic information but also offer opportunities to host videos for demonstrating essential skills, such as procedural clinical skills and communication.¹²

There are many challenges that have to be discussed at the earliest and to be solved by the eminent nursing educators along with INC/statutory bodies, Such as

- a. bringing uniform online teaching/learning technology platforms for all the nursing colleges across the country
- b. Amendments in the pattern of conduct of examinations which may be short term or long term depending on prevailing of pandemic
- c. Guidelines for relocating the students back to the colleges and starting teaching at colleges
- d. Due consideration toward giving more priority, preferably to the local students during the forthcoming admissions of undergraduates and postgraduates
- e. Training/faculty development workshops for medical teachers in regard to newer teaching-learning technologies
- f. There is a necessity for free/open access to e-resource material even after ceasing of trial access by various publishers
- g. Understanding and adaptation to the newer technology for education, such as artificial intelligence for adaptive learning and virtual reality.

Conclusion

There is uncertainty regarding how long this situation will persist and increasing recognition that there may be periods in the future after re-engagement in a “new normal” environment, in which quarantines and social distancing may again be required. The challenge is in providing authentic patient experiences for nursing students as a key component of nursing education under these circumstances. While in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis, it is crucial that the academic educational community learns from the experience and prioritizes a forward-thinking and scholarly approach as practical solutions are implemented.

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