



Digital education amidst global pandemic: A virtual reality for an academic Pathologist!

COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in historic disruption of the education system, medical schools being no exception. Darwin's theory that "It is not the strongest nor the most intelligent of the species that survive; It is the one most adaptable to change" feels relatable now than ever. Accordingly, we have witnessed an accelerating shift in medical pedagogy from conventional in-person classroom learning to virtual modality worldwide.

The idea of routine digital learning seemed far fetched with a bleak future in Nepal not long ago. However, most medical schools have adopted online platforms, to which educators as well as learners are being acclimatized. At our academy, we are delivering Pathology curriculum to first and second-year undergraduate students via online lectures and Problem-based learning via zoom classes. Problem-based learning is a student-centered pedagogy that is conducted in zoom using breakout rooms to divide students into smaller groups with the presence of a tutor for guidance. Exam patterns have also been modified and transitioned to online settings.

Surveys of medical students have shown that the limitations of e-learning were technical issues, lack of self-discipline and social isolation¹, inability to learn skills², and limited communication and interaction³. Additionally, the inability to assess students immediately as to their understanding of the subject matter was a concern amongst the teachers.² Engaging the students in online learning could help in reducing the negative impact of isolation and idleness on mental health and assist to mitigate the COVID-19 induced learning loss. Studies with optimistic feedback from students regarding e-learning^{1,4} add to the enthusiasm.

Amidst the global pandemic, the foundation for digital medical education has been established in Nepal. Blended learning, a combination of traditional face-to-face learning and asynchronous or synchronous e-learning is now popular in medical education in developed nations.⁵ A hybrid modality of digital and traditional learning can be complimentary. Implementing a blended learning methodology in the post COVID era and strengthening our policies and practices of digital learning should be emphasized upon so that we are in a better form for the future, as warned by the WHO "Prepare for next pandemic, COVID-19 is not the last".

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