

“How has medical education been affected during this covid-19 pandemic. How have you adapted your learning style and/or clinical practice?”

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## **Introduction**

There is no denial that the pandemic has forced many unwelcome changes upon us as medical students. However, to the best of my knowledge, there exists a gap in the literature about how this pandemic has allowed medicine to progress in unimaginable ways. This essay will focus on the positive and innovative ways in which medicine has evolved, whilst acknowledging the pressures that medical students have endured.

### **How has medical education been affected during this COVID-19 pandemic**

Ahmed<sup>1</sup> recognises how the pandemic has progressed technological ingenuity, but many don't acknowledge the advances in the teacher-student relationship. Since March, I've seen the pets, living rooms and casual wear of my teaching staff. Medical teachers have become humanised, thus deconstructing the barrier between them and their students. It has opened up communication and increased the questions that are asked and answered. One is more likely to engage, despite a fear of making a mistake, when even the honorary lecturer cannot figure how to share their screen. Medical schools have been adapting to modern teaching methods in an effort to empower students in their learning, this humanisation of authority may help to achieve this.

Medical education has changed to reflect the global circumstances. Suddenly, my project was about children's food insecurity and my ethics examination centred around a virus outbreak. As medical students we often hear that we will only understand the "real world of medicine" once we graduate, yet the pandemic has changed that. Dr Elizabeth Muir, senior clinical lecturer at Imperial College London, says "students seemed to be behaving differently, almost as if they had become much older and calmer, aware of the very real role of being a medical professional; that role was no longer some way off"<sup>2</sup>. The ability of students to apply scientific and ethical knowledge on a global scale, may have increased their motivation; medical student's participation is positively correlated with their incentive and performance<sup>3</sup>. The pandemic has given medical students a platform where they can understand the implications of the profession and increase their participation in the real world.

Sani<sup>4</sup> criticises that the pandemic has initiated a break in tradition but is this just the start of a new era? Medicine is a subject so deeply engrossed in its traditions that the pandemic may be initiating necessary change. For example, online examinations reflect a modern world where doctors can look up basic information in seconds. Do we really want to test our future doctors on their ability to recall facts, or rather their ability to solve problems? Whilst as a medical student, these changes allow a deeper understanding of medicine's fluidity, there is also a sense of inadequacy when one doesn't get to participate in long-standing traditions. Ultimately, the pressures of the pandemic have forced us to look beyond tradition and adapt to the modern world.

There is a general consensus that some medical students flourish whilst others struggle in this pandemic. I disagree that it is a coincidence, and rather an exacerbation of racism that the pandemic has instigated. Racism is a long-standing problem in medical education; over the past three and a half years 60,000 UK medical students have reported racial harassment<sup>5</sup>. The discrimination reached a

breaking point as many UK medical schools acknowledged the presence of inequality. However, a BMJ investigation found that UK medical schools were unequipped to handle this racism, with only 16 of 40 medical schools even collecting data about racial harassment<sup>5</sup>. It was therefore students who successfully led this necessary change. For example, the British Medical Association (BMA) in collaboration with students, created a BMA charter and guidance for experiencing racial harassment<sup>6</sup>. Medical students have been empowered to lead a reform in diversifying medical education.

### **How have you adapted your learning style and/or clinical practice?**

As a result of the extreme pressures, medical students are considered as a vital part of the healthcare team. The interaction between the healthcare professionals and students has changed; instead of asking to practice clinical skills we are being asked to perform them. The new confidence that I feel when I enter the ward means that I am more eager to practice my clinical skills and determined to succeed so that I can make valuable contributions. I have accelerated faster in my clinical practice as I am being confronted with situations that I would not have typically encountered.

I have come to understand the value and necessity of taking a break. The mental and physical burden of the pandemic, combined with academic pressures, means that I felt burnt out. This felt unjustified in a world where I saw exhausted frontline workers risking their own lives, whilst I left my placement at four to attend my remote learning. I found myself ignoring the symptoms that many of my peers falsely recognise as a part of being a medical student. Implementing breaks has enabled me to improve my academic performance, advance my positive resilience and find a deeper appreciation for medicine.

Integrated learning has enabled me to become proactive by adapting my medical education to my own needs. I have been given new control over my learning; all of my lectures and much of my clinical placement can be done when and where I want. At first, this provided me with many challenges in my motivation and also understanding how I work best. I have now learnt that I can personalise the structure of my day to suit my needs and wellbeing, allowing me to achieve a work-life balance. This practice has given me a new depth of awareness of my own working habits.

### **Conclusion**

The constraints of tradition on medicine have long been simmering away, the pressure of the pandemic has caused the pot to boil over. We are now left with the opportunity to reform medical education and it is the students who are taking this change into their own hands. The pandemic has placed a heavy burden onto the shoulders of medical students. Nevertheless, the positive and exciting advances in medical education, prove how medical students are consistently able to rise above their challenges with resilience and ingenuity.

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