

Editorial

Academics during the Pandemic: Adapting to a “New Norm”

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We have been living with the COVID-19 pandemic for over 4 months. It has been a testing time for humanity, even more so for the medical fraternity and health care workers. The pandemic has not only adversely affected the health of our population but also the health care economy and the very social fabric of our society.

On the brighter side, some members of our medical fraternity have pursued academic activities despite these trying times. It is a time for us to ponder upon the pending projects or revisit the shelved manuscripts. Another fruitful outcome of the available academic time has been the virtual meetings or webinars conducted by various societies and industry partners. Many professional societies such as the Indian Society of Vascular and Interventional Radiology (ISVIR), Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR), Society of Vascular Interventional Neurology (SVIN), and Global Embolization Symposium and Technologies (GEST) have organized structured webinar courses in the past few months. These have become very popular with trainees and professionals alike. The webinars have bridged geographic distances and allowed both the speakers and attendees from various time zones to login and discuss the presentations. Some of the webinars were mini conferences with credit hours issued based on self-declaration of the attendees. These virtual conferences offer unique advantages: they offer an opportunity to witness and learn from the doyens and pioneers in one’s field. They have allowed us to connect with peers from across the globe and learn from their practice. These webinars often entail detailed discussion at the end of the presentation, and presenters can even participate during another presentation. Most webinars are brief and focused, long enough to cover the breadth of the topic discussed but short enough to sustain the interest and attention of the attendees. Some of the webinars are recorded and archived for future access and

dissemination. It is needless to mention the time, money, and resources saved in not having to travel to attend these events in person.

The pandemic has offered us the opportunity to explore this previously underutilized platform in medical academia. There has been enough growing interest in this tool among educators that a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of webinars was published by Gegenfurtner et al in 2019.¹ The meta-analysis yielded a few interesting results and affirmed existing beliefs on the positive impact of this educational tool on learners. Nonetheless, online learning cannot replace the benefits of attending medical conferences in person. Apart from being an academic feast, conferences are also a time for socializing, catching up with old friends and sharing moments—that camaraderie is something that is distinctly missing in the digital world.

These virtual conferences have emerged as an opportunity during the restricted lifestyle caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has bridged boundaries and helped us learn from our peers and pioneers in one’s field of work. Hopefully, the positive influence that the webinars have had continues beyond the time of this pandemic, and the online teaching resources created today will expand and serve to enrich our knowledge in the future.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

References

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