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Is online teaching of pathology for undergraduates effective?

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic compelled universities to adopt online teaching (OT). The efficacy of OT needs to be determined and student feedback is one method.

Objective: To compare student perception on OT in pathology with traditional on-site teaching (TOST) and with OT of other disciplines (e.g. parasitology, microbiology, pharmacology, etc.).

Method: Two batches of students who had experienced both OT and TOST in Pathology from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, were selected. A Google form was used to obtain feedback.

Results: Response rate was 58.5% (n=196) after two reminders. 41.3% (n=81) liked only OT, 43.4% (n=85) liked both OT and TOST while, 15.3% (n=30) liked TOST only. The majority (64%; n=103) liked OT due to the availability of recorded study material for future use. 59.8% (n=116) favoured lectures pre-recorded, 8.8% (n=17) on Zoom and 31.4% (n=61) both. Online practicals were considered less effective, similar, and more effective by 42.3% (n=83), 20.4% (n=40) and 37.2% (n=73), respectively, while tutorial classes in OT were regarded more effective, similar and less effective by 57.1% (n=112), 17.3% (n=34), 25.5% (n=50), respectively, than in TOST. The following OT activities in pathology were rated as good, very good or excellent in comparison with other disciplines: lectures 82.7% (n=162), modified practicals 68.4% (n=134), tutorials 80.1% (n=157) and interactive sessions (quizzes, discussion forums, lessons) 77.4% (n=151). When asked as a close-ended question, if there was a difference in the quality of teaching in pathology between OT and TOST apart from technical errors, 82.4% (n=159) did not perceive a difference.

Conclusion: Most responders liked OT due to the availability of recorded-study material. While a majority considered online practicals less effective, online tutorial classes were rated effective compared to TOST. Students perceived no difference in the quality of teaching in Pathology by the two methods. They rated OT in pathology effective compared to OT of other disciplines.

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