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COVID-19—is surgical training back on track?

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Background: The World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic on the 11th March 2020 resulting in implementation of methods to contain viral spread, including curtailment of all elective and non-emergent interventions. During the initial lockdown phase, many institutions experienced changes in rostering practices and redeployment of trainees to non-surgical services, and surgical trainees initially experienced a reduction in operative exposure. We aim to assess whether or not training opportunities have returned to pre lockdown levels.

Methods: Surgical trainees were surveyed anonymously regarding changes in working and educational practices since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11th March 2020. The survey was initially circulated in May 2020 to both core and higher The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) surgical trainees. A second round of the survey was circulated in October 2020. Questions encompassed operative experience, educational activities, access to senior-led training and access to simulation/practical based training methods prior to, during and post the first lockdown phase.

Results: Overall, primary survey response rate was 29% (n=98/340) and secondary survey 17.6% (n= 61/340). Operative sessions (P<0.0001) and cases performed (P<0.0001) no longer show any significant difference compared to pre pandemic levels. Exposure to formal teaching and education sessions have returned to pre COVID levels (P<0.0001). Twenty-three percent of trainees had an examination cancelled, 53% of these trainees have subsequently sat these examinations. Of note 27.7% have had courses cancelled, and 97% of these have not been rescheduled.

Conclusions: Surgical training and education have been significantly impacted in light of COVID-19. This is likely to continue to fluctuate in line with subsequent waves. Significant efforts have to be made to enable trainees to meet educational and operative targets.

Keywords: COVID-19; lockdown; surgical; training; logbook

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Footnote
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