

AB162. SOH21AS143. An assessment of undergraduate medical students perceptions, anxieties and clinical exposure in the COVID-19 era of surgical education—a comparative study of medical students

Jack Lee, Michael Devine, Kevin Barry, Waqar Khan, Ronan Waldron, Iqbal Khan

Department of Surgery, Mayo University Hospital, Castlebar, Mayo, Ireland

Background: The undergraduate medical teaching programme in Ireland is highly regarded internationally, focusing on a blended approach to didactic teaching, clinical skills and a ward-based structure. The COVID-19 crisis has provided many challenges across society, the healthcare service, and with the delivery and maintenance of the aforementioned high standards of undergraduate medical education.

Methods: The experience of undergraduate students was prospectively surveyed for the Autumn/Winter seasons of 2020 and retrospectively compared against their counterparts of 2019, in addition the timetables of the two cohorts of peers were analysed. Exposure to theatre, wards, attachment to a surgical team and the degree of didactic teaching were all assessed. The student experience, their attitudes to surgery, degree of comfort approaching exams and their feelings of knowledge were all assessed. Data was analysed using Software Package Used For Statistical Analysis (SPSS).

Results: There was greater exposure to ward-based teaching (average 9 *vs.* 4.6 hours, P value <0.001) and greater time spent attached to a surgical team (average 23 *vs.* 11.67 days, P value 0.03) in 2019 compared to 2020. Students of both years expressed a desire for increased didactic teaching.

While 2019 students felt more prepared for their exams, there was no statistical significance in a student's confidence in knowledge or in approaching/managing a surgical patient, or indeed in their interest in pursuing a career in surgery.

Conclusions: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant reduction in student's clinical exposure. These are vital aspects of a student's training; however more focused and intense placements may potentially achieve the same levels of proficiency and efficiency in clinical acumen in surgery.

Keywords: COVID-19; education; surgery; teaching; undergraduate

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Footnote

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Ethical Statement: The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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