

Experiences of a Postgraduate Resident during COVID-19: The Trials and Tribulations in the Unique Setting of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

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ABSTRACT

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov-2) will be remembered as a life changing landmark in the medical history. The changes it brought forth in the life of medical students resemble the two sides of a coin. It made them unlearn the conventional methods of education, patient care and research and learn the newer ways of patient interaction through telemedicine, online classes through web-based platforms and completing their thesis and dissertation through different online modes. This commentary is based on such experiences of a postgraduate resident.

Keywords: Medical education, Pandemic, Personal protective equipment

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SARS-Cov-2 also called 'COVID-19' disease needs no introduction. The disease was declared as pandemic by World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020 [1]. Since then, the infection has affected all ages, ethnic, social and cultural groups all over the world but the effect it had and is having on the residents working in medical institutions is far worse. Being a novel virus, nobody knew how it was going to behave and how infectious it would be. Therefore, in late March, the institute decided to send the undergraduate medical students home so as to curb the spread of infection. The patient care got re-scheduled and re-organised to cater only emergency services. It just shattered the dreams of residents who were in the phase of building their career.

Everything was going smoothly when suddenly an uncertainty fell upon us and fear of contracting the disease, spreading the disease to our near and dear ones undermined our dreams. We found ourselves in a unique and unfortunate position amidst COVID-19 pandemic. We are trainees and we literally balanced our medical knowledge with a deadly respiratory illness about which much remains unknown. We wanted to develop our skills as clinicians, but doing so in the current healthcare environment meant adjusting daily routines to embrace new norms while being surrounded by uncertainty.

It had not only affected the working conditions in terms of working hours but also our mental health was at stake. The mortality and morbidity of working residents was 15% which is 20 times more than the average population, as documented by a recent research [2].

Many of the institutions were turned COVID-19 exclusive centres so the learning opportunity (in terms of elective operations and routine procedures) was zilch. This created a sense of disappointment and frustration among the residents. We were fortunate that our institute dealt with both COVID-19 and non COVID-19 cases, which made us adapt to newer concepts of working and interacting with patients. However, long hours of duties, especially when in Personal

Protective Equipment (PPE), was physically and emotionally tiring. I, being a 2nd-year resident, felt mentally incapacitated after wearing a PPE. I once felt so hypoxic in PPE that I went to my fellow resident to get my Arterial Blood Gas Analysis (ABG) to see if I am actually hypoxic. I have claustrophobia and being in a PPE for an eight-hour shift, used to further add to my fear. I cannot imagine how a baby survives in the darkness of the womb with no gateway to escape. It had been almost a year that we too had the similar feeling as if we were in the womb of COVID-19, waiting for our delivery.

The institute, the administration and above all, our department did the best they could to make sure we get the best education with the best protection even in the current scenario. We are having online classes regularly but somewhere we missed that face to face interaction. We are attending to the patients, but, the fear of contracting the disease is always there. We are now desperate to get rid of this anxiety and fear. A ray of hope appeared with the first drive of vaccination which started in the middle of January in our institute. But, will the vaccine work? Will our life come back to normal? What about the new strains coming up? How are we going to fill the gap created in our learning? There are so many 'ifs' and 'buts' still lingering around and we just hope for our safe 'delivery with a good APGAR score' and immediate smile with no more morbidity and mortality.

Universal support and understanding from higher authorities and the general population is the only thing that we are in need to alleviate the distress during our ongoing struggles with COVID-19.

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