



LETTER TO EDITOR

Online Education: A Requisite for Health Professions Education

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The most frightening world pandemic COVID-19, disrupted the higher education institutes (HEI). The encounter and circumstance were really tough for both academicians and learners. Educational curricula's in Pakistan has been modified during this period with distance education models. Prior to the pandemic, universities rarely used technology to teach and assess students. Faculty was reluctant to accept and inculcate technology in the curricula's. In spite of that, emergency remote education (ERE) in Pakistan has made student and faculty cognizant of online tools, platforms and learning management systems. The ERE defined as reshaping teaching and assessment which would have previously been utilized in class activities as blended learning or as distance education with limited formal training to faculty and

students.¹ However, after the quarantine period most of the institutes went back to old ways of teaching methods. Although few tried to remain online education sustainable, trying to adopt flexible and accessible online delivery methods to meet the student needs.² Like "blended learning" which involves online delivery of little amount of course content, another one is the "Hybrid model" which is an amalgamation of online delivery along with in-class sessions; albeit of this, it is mandatory for all learners to attend both modalities.³ Moreover, One more way can be adapted, is the use of the "Hyflex model" in which there is coalescence of in-class and online mode however, all the session and learning activity is offered physically, online (synchronous and asynchronous) giving learners the liberty to choose participation mode.

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Additionally, creating disparity in student experiences like, if some students wish to stay at home and the rest of the class decide to take sessions physically on campus.⁴

It was thought that the lessons learned by educational institutions and challenges faced by faculty due to ERE would have riveted to transform students' future outcomes of learning. Which will definitely emphasize educational institutions on the need to focus on different modes of teaching to improve quality and impact of education.⁵⁻⁶ Unfortunately, in Pakistan context taking heedless approach, many institutions ceased technology use.

Howbeit, now is the high time to regain insight to use online tools and to utilize freely available virtual learning environments. The pandemic and the lock down experience has made us much more sensible and aware about digital poverty and its effects on student wellbeing. Institutions should not lose the motivation and momentum to deliver online education to face changing circumstances and future restrictions to students going for post-graduation internationally. It is always a requisite to explore the barriers students have faced so why not we should sustain online education after pandemic and meets student needs.⁷ During COVID-19 majority of institutions relied upon some form of online mode of teaching reflecting that they have had been trained to do so. Concern is why they are not utilizing their potential to the fullest according to their infrastructure and resources. Conservancy of online education will bring positive results among other benefits such as save time, retain student numbers and bring sustainability in a competitive market.

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