

Research paper 9

Undergraduate student perception of an online course for clinical clerkship in histopathology

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Introduction and objectives: The COVID-19 pandemic instigated a boom in blended learning, compelling academics to employ innovative methods of teaching/learning. This study evaluates the perceptions of medical undergraduates on a one-day self-directed online course in clinical histopathology.

Methodology: The clerkship in clinical pathology in the MBBS course spans two weeks in the 3rd year of the course. During COVID-19, a one-week online course was developed as an adjunct to clinical work, which included a one-day 'Moodle lesson' on clinical histopathology. Excerpts from lectures, videos and images were used to teach a range of topics including specimen collection and transport, grossing, processing, embedding, sectioning, staining, reporting and laboratory errors. An online quiz with real-time feedback assessed learning. Students' perceptions of structure, content, appropriateness, attractiveness and usefulness of the lesson were obtained using a 10-item Google form. Free comments were encouraged. Results were summarised using descriptive statistics.

Results: 245 students who completed the lesson submitted the Google form. All 10 items ("attracted interest", "stated objectives", "content appropriate", "well-organized", "relatable to practise", "tools enhanced understanding", "quiz was useful", "feedback in quiz useful", "useful for self-learning" and "would you like to have this type of activity during system-based modules?") received positive feedback (4-5/5 in 5-point Likert scale) from >90% of students. Overall mean score for the lesson was 4.49/5 (± 0.61). Free comments were positive, with suggestions for improvement.

Discussion and conclusion: Online platforms such as Moodle can be used effectively for teaching not only theoretical concepts, but also practical aspects of medical education, and bring positive perceptions among students, especially when used as an adjunct to clinical teaching.

Keywords: blended learning, clinical pathology, medical education, online teaching, histopathology laboratory

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