

EDITORIAL

BRIDGING GENERATIONS: EVOLVING FORENSIC EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Forensic medicine is the bridge between medicine and law, where medical expertise supports the legal system in the pursuit of justice. Although often viewed as a specialised discipline, all doctors bear medicolegal responsibilities, making forensic medicine an integral component of both undergraduate and postgraduate medical training. It nurtures responsible medical professionals with curiosity, keen attention to detail, and sound analytical skills, enabling them to formulate scientifically valid opinions¹.

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1995 and 2012, comprises a large proportion of today's medical undergraduate population. Unlike previous generations, they have grown up with uninterrupted internet connections, fast access to information, and predominantly virtual interactions. This has made Gen Z fluent and dependent on technology, with a higher preference for self-directed, digitally orientated learning. On the other hand, this has also resulted in shorter attention spans, reduced capacity for passive learning, and challenges in interpersonal skills and social interactions². This emphasises the timely need, as medical educators, to reconsider whether current pedagogical methods meet the needs of the evolving learner.

Forensic education for medical undergraduates in Sri Lanka is delivered through bedside teaching, autopsy observations, case discussions, court/crime scene visits, and lectures. While over the years it has been effective, students' exposure may be limited in some instances by time constraints, case availability, health and safety concerns, and legal/ethical restrictions.

Students may witness only a fragment of a medicolegal case, without appreciating the full process, from clinical/autopsy examination to giving expert evidence at court³. However, the digital shift in medical education and the introduction of virtual simulation, augmented reality, and blended learning create the opportunity to rethink ways forensic medicine can be taught to engage and inspire.

Technology-enhanced learning offers several possibilities:

Virtual and augmented reality may be used to simulate crime scenes, autopsies, sexual assault examinations, and mass disaster response, allowing safe exposure to situations that are ethically sensitive or logistically restrictive.

Digital repositories and online case libraries can be used to broaden clinical exposure beyond what is achievable during a short forensic medicine rotation while offering a wide range of rare cases, postmortem vignettes, specimen archives, and interactive case narratives.

Blended learning platforms can allow students to follow a medicolegal case from the beginning to the end without being physically present throughout. Students may gain a deeper understanding of the subject when they can witness the full process, from evidence collection, analysis, and interpretation to formulating a sound medicolegal opinion.

Self-paced modules and flipped classrooms will be well-suited for the independent learning style of Gen Z. They can further minimise the time spent on didactic lectures and create

opportunities for in-depth case discussions and skill-based learning⁴.

While these opportunities appear enticing and cutting-edge, progress must be strategic, considering the ethical and practical restrictions. Could the increased digitalisation adversely affect an already socially awkward student population? Will it further distance them from the humane aspect of death, trauma, and suffering, which are central to a well-rounded, compassionate medical professional? Creating digital case repositories and online museums may raise concerns about confidentiality, consent, and copyright issues. Resource inequality across institutions may lead to uneven learning experiences, prompting the question of how feasible and fair digital transformation truly is in Sri Lanka. As we move forward in this digital age, the goal should be not to replace traditional teaching but to enhance and complement it. Evolving forensic education for Gen Z must be undertaken with careful and responsible planning⁵. Technology should uplift and support forensic medicine education by giving students access to a wide array of forensic cases, keeping them interested and eager to learn, while preserving the human touch, empathy, and ethics that are core values in forensic medicine.

With technology infiltrating every aspect of life, its impact on medical education is unavoidable. The challenge before us, then, is not just to teach *with* technology but to teach *through* it, without losing the human story at the heart of every medicolegal case.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

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