Palliative and End of Life Care Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic — What Can We Learn?

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Background The COVID-19 pandemic caused far-reaching disruption and medical education had to rapidly adapt to overcome the many challenges. Palliative and End of Life Care (PEOLC) is a core competency for all UK graduating medical students, and may involve emotionally confronting topics requiring great care during teaching sessions, which is potentially difficult in a virtual environment. The ability of medical schools to foster experiential PEOLC learning may also have been impacted. However, the pandemic may have been a catalyst for some positive changes in PEOLC teaching too. Questions relating to the pandemic were included as part of a larger national survey of PEOLC teaching.

Method An anonymised web-based 46-item questionnaire was sent to the PEOLC Teaching Lead(s) at 35 UK medical schools. Responses were compared across all previous surveys.

Results Responses received from 31 schools. Previously popular teaching methods, such as lectures and seminars/small group discussions, were newly introduced in an online format in 94% and 87% of medical schools respectively. Utilisation of e-learning increased from 59% to 84%. Other newly introduced teaching methods included: telemedicine, podcasts, augmented reality, virtual reality, and virtual ward rounds. Use of experience in clinical areas as a teaching method decreased from 100% to 68% of medical schools. In 30% of schools, assessments were no longer in-person. 40% of participants declared that they had developed novel teaching methods or resources during the pandemic, mostly relating to technology enhanced learning or simulation. Many participants shared the opinion that the increased use of online resources and pre-recorded sessions will persist after the pandemic.

Conclusion The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated PEOLC teaching to rapidly transition online and the use of novel approaches to facilitate clinical experience, however a number of medical schools intend to continue utilising skills and resources developed during this time.

References

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