

Conducting Practical examination for second professional first Competency-Based Medical Education batch: An experience of a resident

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Sir,

Any infectious disease that spreads rapidly and covers the globe is known as a pandemic. Until today, many pandemics have occurred, and the world has gradually recovered from them. However, any pandemic affects the world not only medically but also economically, socially, and environmentally. This was also observed during the current COVID-19 pandemic⁽¹⁾.

All the schools and colleges were closed, and teaching started online. However, medical colleges were working as these being the only institutes that could prepare the task force to fight the pandemic. The faculty took theoretical classes online, but conducting practical classes online was tough. Amidst, the Medical Council of India (MCI), now known as the National Medical Council (NMC), changed the undergraduate Medical Course (MBBS) teaching pattern after 22 years. The new revised curriculum and teaching pattern is called Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME)⁽²⁾. The examination patterns also changed with the change in teaching patterns. Medical colleges taught students online and offline, but the final examination had to be conducted physically to evaluate the future medical task force.

Conducting the practical exam was more challenging, wherein the government promoted social distancing. Calling all the students for the exam physically was tougher. Students and their parents or guardian had to be convinced first to send their ward to medical school. After convincing them, the university and college had to arrange the exam schedule⁽³⁾. Scheduling the exam was even tougher. In order to prepare a one-page schedule on paper, multiple times of workforce and efforts of multiple personnel were utilized. Conducting the theoretical exam was slightly easier than the practical, as all the students would sit on their fixed seats in various classrooms. It would be completed in just three hours of 2-3 days. However, practical exams were conducted in one laboratory with a few students' batches which can continue for 8-10 days.

As per NMC and university rules, the college had to invite and arrange external examiners for practical exams to evaluate the students. This was also challenging. People avoided traveling and crowd⁽⁴⁾. If any faculty was ready to go to another medical college for the examination, they had to follow the traveling guidelines as per government instruction for that state. Traveling from one state to another state was even more difficult compared to traveling in the same city as an examiner. Furthermore, if any examiner was diagnosed with COVID-19 at the last moment, it was an extra hurdle to conduct the exam. Calling new examiners for the practical exam who may not be familiarised with the university and college system could be an additional headache for exam conveners and experts.

Other than the examiner part, students also faced a similar scenario. During the pandemic, significant disturbing effects were noticed in students' routine life, including learning and study efficacy⁽⁵⁾. More than 50% of the second year period was spent at home. They attended classes online, which were not interactive as physical classroom teaching. After 6-8 months of online teaching, they directly appeared for the final exam, which was their first physical experience with the subject laboratory. Many materials related to the subject were seen first time during the examination. A few students were diagnosed with COVID-19 when they came from home for the final examination. The examination was conducted repeatedly for the remaining students due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conclusion of the experience with this new CBME pattern, teaching, and exam conduction was a mixed type. NMC prepared a new pattern for improving syllabus teaching, but the experience was not as good as expected due to the pandemic. We hope the next year's exam conducting will not be much headache and can be completed without any hurdles. Students and examiners will attend the practical exam without fear or restrictions of the pandemic.

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