



Letter to the Editor

The Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 on Medical Conferences and Continuing Medical Education

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Dear Editor,

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, announced by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, has since submerged across the world, affecting nearly every nation with significant alterations on everyday life.^[1] In response, certain measures, such as social distancing and quarantine, have been implemented by many countries to help impede the spread of the virus.^[1] These protective measures have had major consequences on medical professional's continuous professional development (CPD). Medical professionals rely on enhancing their knowledge and sharing new scientific information through conferences, symposiums, and congresses.^[2] The uncertainty regarding the duration and control of COVID-19 spread renders future planning of these events almost impossible. We performed a snapshot survey to analyze the effect of COVID-19 on medical conferences and continuing medical education. This was conducted online through the web-based platform SurveyMonkey. We received a total of 100 anonymous responses from medical professionals of all grades across the world. The responses were collected at random over 2 months. Results showed a significant drop in the attendance of number of applicants to medical meetings, from 52% to 37%, between the years 2019 and 2020. Live academic meetings are historically known to be the best method for medical professionals to gather and disseminate information, share new knowledge, and set new evidence-based policies and guidelines. It also provides a platform to allow improvement of professional skills, by means of workshops and presentations. Our survey revealed that 60% of medical professionals attended medical meetings mainly for lectures and workshops. Another important advantage relates to the provision of social interaction between candidates arriving from different backgrounds.^[3]

Unfortunately, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, many planned meetings had to be cancelled, postponed, or rearranged to become virtual. Virtual meetings have become the default method of dissemination of scientific knowledge and facilitating CPD, and many organizations had to adapt to the rapid change to online meetings in a short period of time. These can be done in the form of webinars and hybrid meetings. These are easily available through multiple platforms, examples include Zoom teleconferencing, Microsoft teams, and GoToWebinar. In the current pandemic, online meetings are safe and inhibit the spread of the virus.

Moreover, virtual meetings have substantial economic advantages, including saving travel, money, and time. About 41% of our survey responders favor online meetings as there was no travel hassle. In addition, online virtual meetings could potentially increase the financial cost-effectiveness for businesses hosting the meetings, as essentially, the program could be easily accessible from all over the world.^[4] However, our survey revealed that 55% of responders disliked the unsociable aspect

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of virtual meetings, as it diminished chances of networking. In conclusion, as the uncertainty of the effect of coronavirus on medical conferences continues, virtual conferences should be embraced, and organizers should seek to enhance delivery methods and aim to invent new platforms to allow more interaction between attendees and organizers, replicating the sense of collaboration and socialization that you would normally get with face-to-face events.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors Dr. Naga Varaprasad Vemuri is the Joint editor, and Dr. Rajesh Botchu is on the Advisory Board of this journal. They do not have any conflict of interest.

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