To Stay at Port or to Go to Sea: Are Clinical Clerkships a Double-Edged Sword During the COVID-19 Pandemic? Where Do We Go From Here?

Mihnea-Alexandru Găman,1 Paul MacDaragh Ryan,2 Francisco Javier Bonilla-Escobar.3

The ongoing pandemic has changed the way medicine is taught and learned. The unexpected challenges of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 worldwide have forced our educators to rethink in a rather narrow window of time the organization of medical education all around the globe. In many countries, clinical clerkships have been cancelled and medical students’ access to university hospitals has been restricted. Lectures have been replaced by online courses and, in many instances, case presentations have replaced classical rotations in the hospital. Although it is not difficult to understand why these measures were put into practice, one is still left wondering: are clinical clerkships dispensable in the training of a future physician? Also, to what extent has the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic affected the work of residents and young researchers? In the current and previous issue of the International Journal of Medical Students, many of these topics are tackled in the Experience articles that we decided to publish with perspectives from countries including Italy,1–3 China/Zimbabwe,4 Spain,6 the United States,1–5 Mexico,1–5,12 India,14,15 Pakistan,18 Vietnam,24 Saudi Arabia,23 Canada,2–4,23 Thailand,44 Ecuador,45 Nigeria,46 Democratic Republic of Congo,23–25 Ireland,26,29,30 the United Kingdom,31–34 South Africa,35 Jamaica,34 and Greece.35,36

Sir William Osler’s quote "he who studies medicine without books sails an uncharted sea, but he who studies medicine without patients does not go to sea at all" is the theme of the latest issues of the International Journal of Medical Students. As a rhetorical question has arisen in the minds of all students in medicine worldwide: can we actually learn medicine without direct interaction with real patients? When we were younger and progressing through medical school, we sometimes had the delusion that digesting as much medical information as possible could be comparable to the knowledge which we accumulated during our undergraduate training. Although the cancellation of clinical clerkships was decided in order to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2, as well as to reduce the unnecessary use of limited personal protective equipment, we wonder how our future colleagues will adapt to these changes and what will be the sequelae of these decisions. Medical educators are currently struggling between their duty to protect their students from unnecessary harms and their duty to educate the clinicians of tomorrow; to stay at port or to go to sea.

Medical academics will require rapid innovative thinking and continued determination to identify potential solutions to address unavoidable training deficiencies which are likely to arise as a result of these difficult times, since the lack of clinical clerkships will impact the education of medical students in a range of foreseeable and unforeseeable manners. In line with this, we believe that it has never been so important to provide a platform to present the unexpected ways in which the lives and training of medical students, residents, senior physicians, members of academia and researchers worldwide have all been affected by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.43

In this issue, we are sharing not only the experiences of colleagues from all over the world, but the results of a survey to identify perceptions of how the current lockdowns have affected students’ learning process,44 important reviews on COVID-19,45 including the potential effects of probiotics in the disease,46 and a case report of a patient with gastrointestinal symptoms as the main manifestation.47 This last article kept us wondering about a public health problem that is yet to come if it is proven that the virus can spread in stools, especially for those regions of the world highly affected by disparities and low- and middle-income countries.48 As always, we are also publishing about general medicine topics. You will find original articles about the effects of schoolbags weigh in children,49 prognostic factors for mortality of rocky mountain spotted fever,50 the association of acute liver failure with heat stroke,51 gene variants in major depressive disorder in patients with childhood trauma,52 novel biomarkers in Alzheimer’s disease,53 and the description of artifacts in electrocardiograms due to neurostimulators.54

Correspondence:
Mihnea-Alexandru Găman
Address: Bulevardul Eroii Sanitari 8, București 050474, Romania
Email: mihneaagaman@yahoo.com, scientific.editor@ijms.info

Affiliations:
1 MD, PhD student. "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania. Department of Hematology, Center of Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplantation, Fundeni Clinical Institute, Bucharest, Romania. Scientific Editor, International Journal of Medical Students (IJMS)
2 MB BCs BAO PhD. Cork University Hospital, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Deputy Editor, IJMS.
3 MD, MSc, PhD(c). University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, USA. Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia. Science to Serve the Community Foundation, SCISCO Foundation / Fundación SCISCO. Editor in Chief, IJMS.
Our missions of spreading science does not end with the publication of an issue. Systemic racism continues to prevail in the face of the blinding spotlights which have been drawn upon it in the recent months. In an Experience article in this issue, Pak and colleagues explore the origins of SARS-CoV-2 and draw conclusions of the detrimental consequences intended by the use of xenophobic terms, which are banned from the International Journal of Medical Students.

In these difficult times where science has been put on test by the general public and especially politicians, we close this Editorial with a call for decisions makers to listen to science. No vaccines should be administered without the proper research. We cannot go back before the Nuremberg Code (1947). Even governors and people in power should follow ethical principles when dealing with human lives.

The journal remains a global forum for medical trainees of all nations. As such, we will continue to play a central role in promoting accurate and respectful scientific dialogue, in an effort to combat misinformation and xenophobic rhetoric.
References
To Stay at Port or to go to Sea: Are Clinical Clerkships a Double-Edged Sword during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Where do we go From Here?

Acknowledgments

The Executive Committee of the International Journal of Medical Students (IJMS) is grateful for the involvement of the Editorial Team in the publication of this issue. We would also like to wholeheartedly thank the external peer-reviewers who evaluated the manuscripts submitted to the journal.

Conflict of Interest Statement & Funding

The Authors have no funding, financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.

Author Contributions

Writing – Original Draft Preparation: M-AG. Writing – Review & Editing: M-AG, PMR, FJBE.

Cite as:


This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

ISSN 2076-6327

This journal is published by the University Library System, University of Pittsburgh as part of the Digital Publishing Program and is co-sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.