

Title: Postgraduate multidisciplinary online course for resource-limited institutes

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What problem was addressed: There is a lack of multidisciplinary approach in current postgraduate curriculum due to lack of expertise. In a resource-limited setting it is not possible to immediately develop expertise in all postgraduate courses. One of the strategies to address this issue can be development of online multidisciplinary courses. Faculty and students are important stakeholders in the curriculum and trained PGs will also be working in low resource settings. This can improve the standard practices across the country within and outside the institute including remote cities with limited resources.

What was tried: A metabolic bone diseases (MBD) module was selected to be developed as representative module for multidisciplinary approach. A multi-disciplinary, multi-institute faculty team was formulated with experts from radiology, orthopaedics, medicine, endocrinology, clinical chemistry, and education from across Pakistan. Email communications and e-meetings were carried out to keep the team updated. I was both directive and inviting and acknowledged active faculty. A hands-on workshop on virtual learning environment (VLE) for selected faculty was conducted by digital learning network of the institute with faculty from other cities connected via the online platform Zoom. This network team was convinced to allow the use of facilities for the postgraduate module as till now they were mainly involved in undergraduate courses. The team decided upon four components of the MBD module: osteoporosis, nutrition, parathyroid disorders, and rare bone diseases. The multidisciplinary faculties identified fourteen PGs from their respective specialties with whom two focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted. These PGs included fellows and residency years 1-5. PGs from various cities participated via Zoom. Major FGD themes identified included the dire need for application based online multidisciplinary modules which should be feasible in a busy clinical schedule in all the institutes with resource limited settings and concerns of managing large number of patients with MBD in limited time. They preferred asynchronous modules with micro-lectures and wanted case challenges for learning and assessment. Faculty developed content mostly based on case scenarios posing critical thinking and decision making. A module component on osteoporosis was prepared with recorded micro-lectures, flash cards, video, case challenges, and mini-interview with expert. The team tried minimizing required reading. Quizzes prepared were reviewed by content and educational experts and content related evidence for validity and feasibility was reviewed by five other faculty. Team had strategic celebrations whenever a milestone was reached.

What lessons were learned: To involve clinical faculty from busy schedules for meetings and preparing course material should be planned in advance and sufficient and flexible time should be provided. Another caveat was limited resources for faculty development especially those at a distance. Yet a strength was the willingness of the Blended Learning Department to support a postgraduate module. Faculty entered the realm of teaching online for the first time, hence they gelled together well. Feedback from PGs provided an insight into the actual need and design of the online working module and helped in winning faculty commitment. An institute with good facilities for faculty training can develop online multidisciplinary modules for the benefit of institutes with resource-limited settings.

Reference:

Schneckenberg, D. (2010), Overcoming barriers for eLearning in universities—portfolio models for eCompetence development of faculty. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 41: 979–991. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2009.01046.