

Coping with nursing education during a pandemic

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has presented both the lecturers and students with ‘the good and the bad’. Conventional means of training preregistration healthcare workers or delivering lectures seems not to be adequate in the face of limited periods for face to face classes. Different avenues have been developed by educational institutions to mitigate the absence of face to face lectures. In order to maintain high standards of education and production of healthcare workers capable of providing desired level of care to patients, it is necessary for different stakeholders to come together with the aim of developing sustainable alternative means of teaching at every level of the educational system.

Keywords: COVID 19; Pandemic; Nursing Education; Technology

1 Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has devastated many public and private institutions; causing unprecedented havoc and disruption in the socioeconomic; psychological and financial lives of individuals and communities as a whole. First case of COVID-19 infection was reported in Namibia during March 2020. This prompted gradual lockdowns and eventual closures of schools; including higher education centres. We provide training to pre-registration nurses at a newly accredited nursing school in Namibia; the current COVID-19 pandemic caught our institution unaware; thus; no preparation was made for extra-face to face lecture delivery system. Nursing education involves training pre-registration nurses in different aspects of nursing and nursing care [1]. Higher education teaching and associated responsibilities of ensuring the making of a total person; who is able to function as a professional in the workplace and also; integrate well within the society can be overwhelming. Knowing that students are reflections of the institutions where they were trained; it became imperative that adequate structures are in place for effective learning and communication skills. Provision of effective learning environment can be daunting in situations that are unfavourable to learning [2]. The need for clinical placement was grossly undermined by the pandemic because of the panic caused by the increasing spread of the viral infection within the community.

There was a need to keep students active; thus; ensuring that learning did not stop in the midst of a pandemic. Innovative ideas were developed by different stakeholders to the end that students are kept engaged and lecturers retain their livelihood. Such innovative ideas included;

- Provision of live online lectures [3;4];
- Use of mobile applications to provide guidance and lecture notes to students [5].

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The place of face to face lecture delivery cannot be overemphasized in a setting such as Namibia where there is varying accessibility to technologies that can enhance learning by the students. Involvement of the Ministry of Higher Education and other stakeholders with interest in education was not sought by our institution in the provision and implementation of alternative platforms for teaching; this might be true about most private higher institutions in Namibia. Higher education institutions in developed countries have integrated both face to face and advanced technological platforms to deliver lectures. These gave them upper hand at the peak of the pandemic; this is in contrast to what is obtainable in a developing country like Namibia.

In view of possible limitations associated with online teaching mode in Namibia; it is imperative to develop workable solutions that will be applicable to students at different levels of technological know-how. The system used to deliver lectures during COVID-19 lockdowns have not been evaluated or validated; thus; the effectiveness and relevance of this system in Namibian educational system is not known. To achieve maximum success with online learning platforms; lecturers need to be abreast of available technologies and how learning can be enhanced using the preferred platform; such platforms should be suitable and amenable to the needs of students; in this case; nursing students.

Some of the perceived limitations of electronic or online learning for nursing education include;

- Motivation to study and proper time management skills may be lacking in most students; since; there will not be direct oversight by lecturers.
- Affordability by and availability of gadgets such as laptops; smartphones etc. are barriers to learning for some students.
- Social interaction between lecturer to students; and student to student will be lost. This can be critical nursing training setting; where hands on learning or training is necessary to pass across skills.
- As highlighted earlier; theory can be taught online but students need to be on ground so as to imbibe skills.

Stakeholder engagement is a necessity in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on students of higher educational institutions and quality of education they receive. It is necessary for the government to assist private institutions in sourcing quality platforms or alternative modes of delivering educational material. We propose further studies on the impact and utility of online platforms in areas of study such as health; especially; nursing.

2 Conclusion

Pandemics or unexpected natural disasters can cause disruptions in normal functioning of institutions and this might impact how lectures are being delivered to students. This paper has highlighted the challenges faced by students and how our institution tried to deal with the situation during the pandemic. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of such intervention.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Authorship

BAA & OOO conceptualize and designed the format of the paper. BAA & OOO drafted the manuscript. All the authors agreed on the final version to be published.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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