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COVID-19 an opportunity or a disaster for undergraduate medical education?

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COVID-19 AN OPORTUNNITY OR A DISASTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION?

COVID-19 ¿UNA OPORTUNIDAD O UN RETRASO PARA LA EDUCACIÓN MÉDICA DE PREGRADO?

Rodrigo Flores-Quiroga^{1,2,a}

Mr. Editor

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) first appeared in December 2019 in China; and it was not until March 6, 2020 that the authorities gave the news about the first case in our country⁽¹⁾. The world's media have widely publicized the impact of this pandemic on society, even paying special attention to health personnel; however, another group of the population has also been affected, medical students⁽²⁾.

In most countries, undergraduate medical education is divided into two well-differentiated periods: the preclinical, where students receive classes in classrooms, laboratories, and auditoriums; and the clinical, where the scene is transferred to health centers for direct interaction with patients⁽²⁾. This clinical education is ideally characterized by problem-based teaching, where a group of students acquires skills, such as the correct physical examination, all this from the hand of a medical tutor⁽³⁾.

The COVID-19 pandemic has represented a problem for students, since their presence in health centers is a risk of contagion, not only for patients, but also for themselves; This is how social distancing, including the cessation of face-to-face activities, has prevented students from having the hospital experience necessary for their training⁽⁴⁾. One of the main responses of medical schools has been to promote virtual education through videoconferences and other multimedia tools such as videos or readings that had already been used as a complement to traditional education⁽⁵⁾.

Although the measures implemented have helped undergraduate education to continue, they also show a series of shortcomings, among which are the limitation of computers and internet access for many students and teachers, thus losing an equal education⁽⁵⁾. On the other hand, many doctors wonder what these new generations of doctors will be like; some are optimistic and confident that it is the perfect opportunity for a renewal in medical education; however, others believe with certainty that aspects such as knowledge, attitudes and practices will be affected⁽⁵⁾.

Although many believe that medical education will suffer a delay, opportunities come to light that perhaps without the current situation, could not present themselves. Now it is necessary to reconsider what is important and discard or modify those things that are not; For example, the virtual interaction between teacher and student can serve as a prelude to the inevitable future of telemedicine⁽³⁾. The current situation can also serve to empower students in their own training; for example, through the different societies of medical students. These organizations have the ability to convene different professionals and organizations from different parts, to create or modify study plans that, had they been other times, would be impossible.

There is no doubt that education will undergo a series of changes, and that the generation of new

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doctors "post COVID-19" will develop other ways of approaching the patient; however, it is still early to draw qualifying conclusions that determine whether

current and upcoming circumstances resulted in an opportunity or a delay for undergraduate medical education.

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