

Letter to the Editor

Pharmacy Education and Role of the Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kanwal Ashiq¹, Sana Ashiq², Haleema Sadia³

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Dear Editor,

In December 2019, a new viral disease “COVID-19” was discovered. On 11th February 2020, an official name “SARS-COV-2” was adopted for the culprit virus by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses. This infectious disease is highly contagious, and up till now, it has caused severe morbidity and mortality across the globe. On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared that the COVID-19 disease has reached a pandemic state and issued various precautionary measures to avoid the spread of this infection. Soon after the announcement, almost every sort of social, cultural, educational, political and traditional activity was suspended and a complete lockdown was observed globally.^{1,2}

On 15th March 2020, after the government announcement, all educational activities and examinations were canceled in Pakistan. In this situation, online teaching appeared as the best possible option and all institutions have been directed to activate remote teaching to continue the learning process. A sudden move from physical teaching to virtual education was a great challenge for teachers, students and educational administration. Across the globe, schools, colleges and universities spent great efforts in the launching of several online training sessions to equip educators in distance teaching. All types of conferences, workshops, seminars and scientific meetings were either postponed or managed to conduct electronically so that knowledge can share in a timely fashion. The common goal of all strategies was to ensure the smooth conductance of educational doings without compromising quality. However, internet access, computer or mobile device

availability, voice modulations, lack of real-time simulations and absence of teacher-student emotional connection remained problematic factors to achieve the objective.³

The current concern of this letter is to focus on pharmacy education and teachers’ role in achieving goals during the pandemic. The Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm-D) is a five-year professional degree that centered on a multidisciplinary curriculum. This program encompasses theoretical sessions with practical demos and experimentations. As per instructions of the respective regulatory council, the pharmacy aspirants also bind to visit industries, hospitals, retail pharmacies, and clinics to gain real-time experience and to strengthen their knowledge.⁴ Teachers of all grade levels and regional areas are capable enough to do exceptional things. They have a true spirit and can stand up during the time of crisis. Kindness, positive attitude, caring, empathy, and humanity are essential ingredients of the teaching profession. During COVID-19, teachers responded instantly to teach new online modules by utilizing various digital tools like Zoom, Google Meet, LMS (learning management system), and Skype. Likewise, this COVID-19 era led pharmacy teachers to virtual education readiness. Over the past several months, teachers struggled a lot and tried their best to arm their students with quality education. Added to this fatigue, teachers ensure their availability all the time and looked busier than their usual in-class routine. As teachers have to work at home in front of their computers, their families’ also needing attention, care, and time. It is observed that experienced teachers are well in handling crisis pressure but they are somewhat less tech-savvy. The virtual learning

1. Kanwal Ashiq, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Superior University Lahore, Pakistan, Punjab University College of Pharmacy, University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan.
2. Sana Ashiq, Centre for Applied Molecular Biology (CAMB), University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan.
3. Haleema Sadia, Department of Biotechnology, BUIITEMS, Quetta, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Kanwal Ashiq, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Superior University Lahore, Pakistan, Punjab University College of Pharmacy, University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: kanwal.ashiq@superior.edu.pk

elements that influence the teachers' performance during the COVID-19 crisis are as follows; technical competencies, availability of online teaching facilities and tools, pedagogy, time constraints, attitude, and training. Though, teachers have succeeded in delivering the theoretical content of the pharmacy curriculum via a web-based approach. A deficiency may exist in the execution of laboratory work. Due to the pandemic, undergraduate students cannot do internships in hospital, industries, clinics, and pharmacies and it raises a serious concern among teachers. The worldwide pandemic that we faced in 2020 has caused an immense disturbance in the relationship between teachers and their students. It is important to note that face-to-face interactions are the true essence of this profession. Though teaching had been already a complex job, this pandemic has turned this heartwarming and cheering profession into the stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, and distress about students' future and safety. COVID-19 pandemic led to unadorned issues in pharmacy education and teachers' training. Once the pandemic

is over, teachers, students, and universities should have to look for flexible approaches to patch up the damage. Policymakers must develop and implement policies for the practical training of the students and should also encourage the teachers to boost their professional knowledge and upgrade their technological skills.^{5,6}

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