



Tele Education in Iranian Dental Universities During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The pandemic of coronavirus which started in December 2019 has quickly impacted the entire world including our country. Iran's government has responded with a lock down which involved shutting of dental universities and a shift from traditional classrooms to online classes and e-learning. Although this approach can offer an innovative solution to resume dental practice during this pandemic, yet there are many challenges for acceptance and improvement of teledentistry to overcome. In this letter we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of tele education and its influence on dental students training process.

Keywords: *Online System; Dental Faculty; COVID-19 Pandemic; Traditional Classroom*

The spread of COVID-19 has led to the closure of educational institutions all over the world. This tested the preparedness of universities including dental faculties to deal with a crisis that requires the help of advanced technology including hardware and software to enable effective online learning. Such closure accelerated the development of the online learning environments so that learning would not be disrupted. Many dental institutions have become interested in how to best deliver course content online, engage learners and conduct assessments. Hence, COVID-19 while being a hazard to humanity, has evolved dental institutions to invest in online learning [1].

The first cases of COVID-19 patients were officially announced on 19 February 2020 in Qom city, Iran. In response to the coronavirus the government closed schools and universities including dental institutes. From now on, universities have started to use tele education as a mean to teach dental students. Therefore, it is essential to establish a proper online educational system for students to meet their needs [2].

Since COVID-19 virus almost always spread by the air, dental students are in a serious danger of getting affected. This subject is one of the most important reasons which justify the use of tele education in dental practice [3].

Online learning systems are web-based software for distributing, tracking, and managing courses over the Internet [4]. It involves the implementation of advancements in technology to direct, design and deliver the learning content, and to facilitate two-way communication between students and faculty [5].

Various studies have been conducted around the world which suggest some advantages and disadvantages of tele education. For instance; a study was performed in 2020 by Mukhtar, *et al.* [6] in a dental university which claimed some of the advantages of online classes include remote learning, comfort, accessibility while the limitations involved inefficiency and difficulty in maintaining academic integrity.

Another study was conducted in 2020 by Chopra, *et al.* [7] which declared that despite many notable benefits that tele education has, still dental students prefer traditional classrooms over e-learning. This result has found to be related to difficulties cited by dental students which include no practical classes, no clinical exposure, technical difficulties, bad network connection and a strayed teacher student relationship.

On the other hand, a study carried out in 2017 by Azizi, *et al.* [8] in Iran before the pandemic of corona virus which illustrated that

dental students of Azad university of Tehran have no preference between online and traditional classes.

Tele training has played a magnificent role in medical students' education as well. For example, in a study performed in 2020 by Dost, *et al.* [9] it was described that the uses of online teaching platforms allowing medical students to digest information in their own time but also allows students to then constructively discuss this material with peers. It has also been shown to be effective in terms of achieving learning outcomes.

In a research conducted in 2020 by Oki, *et al.* [10] video conferences have been perceived by dental students to be a very useful in synchronous disseminating knowledge in dental education with several notes for quality improvement.

A study performed in 2020 by Veselina, *et al.* [11] emphasized that tele education need to be analyzed and improved to meet modern technology requirements and student needs. In this case, this method can be effectively used in the future as one of the most significant educational tools.

Due to all the advantages and disadvantages cited in these articles we can easily conclude that tele education is a new method of training in dental faculties which needs essential changes according to dental students' needs in order to perform better. Since dental education needs clinical lessons and direct interactions with patients, this novel technique can never totally substitute traditional classroom method.

Moreover, dental training needs to be illustrated on a real patient and necessitate more than 20 minutes direct counteractions with people visiting dental universities. With the pandemic of corona virus, this method is no longer usable and an adequate distance between patient and dental practitioner is required. In addition, some universities have tended to reduce the number of requirements which each dental student needs to deliver. These limitations may lead to insufficient training of dental students and eventually may cause a remarkable quality reduction of dental cares given.

On the other hand, techniques of teaching dental take cares to patients have changed due to the pandemic of corona virus. Since the pandemic, dental probationers utilize videos, voices or other online tools instead of direct teaching. These new online methods

are accessible all the time but have some various disadvantages as well. One of the most significant disadvantages of online teaching is that this method doesn't allow the patient to ask his questions immediately. Hence, online teaching only can be used as an additional mean in dental training.

Although, with making some improvements in this method, we can use tele education as a supplementary technique to produce a more effective education for dental students.

Since this method was urgently used in the early 2020, we witnessed many deficiencies which will probably lead to subsequent poor outcomes in the near future. Hence not only communities should try to enhance this method but also dental students who were educated by this technique should take some supplementary courses in order to reduce the possible adverse results which may conclude.

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