

Lessons Learned from COVID-19: Intern Peer Teaching During a Pandemic

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Dear Editor,

The potential for the COVID-19 pandemic to overwhelm the Irish healthcare system necessitated an increase in the number of frontline healthcare workers. This included the early recruitment of over 1000 interns six weeks in advance of their predicted start date.¹ This 2-tier intern system created a unique opportunity for established interns to pass on wisdom to their novice counterparts.

Peer-teaching fosters an approachable environment and benefits tutors by consolidating knowledge and provides valuable teaching skills.^{2,3}

We sought to establish intern peer-led teaching as a means to educate and alleviate the anxiety of new doctors beginning their career amidst a global pandemic.

Newly recruited interns were invited to complete anonymised surveys regarding their confidence and level of preparedness relating to on-call duties, and their perceived areas of strengths and weaknesses. Nine 15-minute intern peer-led tutorials were organised focusing on common IOC duties including management of chest pain, fever, falls, electrolyte abnormalities and delirium. Confidence levels were reassessed subsequent to the tutorials with follow-up questionnaires. Peer-tutors were surveyed on whether the experience increased their knowledge of the subject matter.

Of the 60 interns invited to attend the tutorials, 39 completed the survey (65% response rate). Twenty-nine (74.4%) felt 'somewhat confident' beginning IOC duties, ten (25.6%) were 'not confident' with no students (0%) 'very confident'. The duties interns felt least prepared for were pharmacology (71.8%; 28/39), medical emergencies (66.7% 26/39), ECG interpretation 64.1% (25/39) and triaging multiple calls (51.3%; 20/39).

Thirty-two (82.1%) felt most prepared for procedures (venesection, cannulation, catheterisation), with fifteen (38.5%) comfortable with patient review. Overall, thirty-nine (100%) respondents found peer-led teaching beneficial.

A follow-up survey was performed with twenty-five respondents (42% response rate). Twenty-five (100%) believed the talks increased their confidence for IOC shifts. Twenty-four (96%) felt confident they would be able to call for help. Twenty-five (100%) respondents would recommend similar sessions in the future.

Five (55.6%) peer tutors had no prior teaching experience; six (66.6%) felt the tutorial improved their own knowledge of the topic. Nine (100%) said they would do it again.

Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, medical students were recruited six weeks earlier than their counterparts in years gone by. IOC duties are daunting for any newly qualified doctor but much more so amidst a global healthcare crisis. Ten (25.6%) students were 'not confident' with no students (0%) claiming to be very confident.

Thirty-two (82%) of our interns felt most prepared for procedural skills which we speculate is as a result of starting their post earlier and with increased peer supervision.

Peer and near-peer teaching have been shown to be an effective pedagogical method as students find the information more relevant² in addition to creating a more approachable environment.

Peer teachers gain the opportunity to increase personal knowledge and acquire teaching experience.⁴ Six (66.6%) tutors felt the process improved their knowledge of the topic and 100% would opt to get involved again.

We believe this can set a precedent and improve the educational experience of new doctors by providing them with pertinent information prior to starting 'on-call' duties.

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