

... And then there was COVID!

Most of us went back to work in January 2020 filled with ideas and plans for our teaching commitments for the year. Little did we know that in March these ideas would in all likelihood have to change radically!

Welcome to part II of the special edition of *AJHPE* that focuses on teaching and learning during the COVID pandemic. Authors of articles included in this issue write of the speed of change that was required in teaching methods when lockdown was thrust upon us all. This change brought challenges to both teachers and students and, as a consequence, stress, albeit for different reasons to both groups. This need for change resulted in many teachers becoming creative and innovative in their teaching methods.

It is evident that the pandemic impacted undergraduate and postgraduate students, but the impact for the two groups was somewhat different in nature. For undergraduate students, the lockdown required that they learn through a different medium – online learning. The suddenness with which this happened created a new stress for students who did not have access to a computer and/or a stable internet connection. Students who did have access to a computer and stable internet may not necessarily have had the technological skills to manage online learning, and the inability to connect with friends and colleagues created added stress. Closely related to the issues of lack of resources for online learning is the issue of fairness and justice. Rawls^[1] theory of justice as fairness is based on two principles: that each student has an equal opportunity to access an adequate means to learning; and that no one should be disadvantaged and that inequalities in students' social and economic situations be remedied to ensure equal opportunity.

The stress for postgraduate students may have been a little different. Those completing higher degrees or specialist studies were probably at the frontline, providing and contributing to healthcare services. This meant that time normally dedicated to studies was no longer available, and many practitioners were allocated to help in areas that were not their field of

expertise. Further, these frontline workers had to cope with extended working hours and the fear of taking the virus home to their families and loved ones.

During the pandemic, a challenge in teaching health science students was ensuring that the necessary skills and competencies for clinical practice were taught and developed. This was a concern for teachers. Another concern related to assessment. The usual methods of assessing learning had to change – both for theoretical and practical learning. Changed methods of assessment left teachers pondering the question of the reliability and validity of their assessment methods.

However, it would be remiss of one to think that teachers did not face their own personal stresses. Those most comfortable in the contact teaching space now had to become familiar with online teaching platforms, learn to be creative in how to present material and generally improve their technological skills.

All of these concepts are explored, through a variety of research designs, in the articles included in this issue.

I end with this thought – if we had known what March 2020 was to bring to our teaching spaces and had time to prepare, what measures would we have put in place, and would we have done anything differently from what we did?

P A McNerney

Centre for Health Science Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Patricia.McNerney@wits.ac.za

1. Rawls J. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.