

Report

Adapting to a new world through virtual medical education

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Even the darkest clouds carry a silver border. Who would have thought that a pandemic that struck mankind in the Autumn of 2019 would carry the untold horrors that we have collectively witnessed in the last 18 months? The early days of 2020 caused huge losses of life and property. By spring, the world was waking up to an unseen and untold tragedy. Hospitals were inundated with waves of sick and dying. Graveyards were overflowing and the world stood by, knowing little of what to do.

By May, we realized that education was suffering immensely, particularly MEDICAL EDUCATION. Educators were at a loss: how could we adapt teaching, training, and evaluating students as we were pushed into an online world? How could we train Medical Educators in new technologies, pedagogy, evaluation, and other pertinent topics? It was time to fortify, to ring in a new era of teaching and learning, and to adapt our pedagogy to reflect these trying times.

Imamia Medics International (IMI), a medical professional body and registered non-profit organization based in Princeton, New Jersey, served as a platform to establish the Sadiq International Virtual University (SIVU). As a global non-profit organization, IMI has been engaged in humanitarian services, as well as ongoing medical assistance to, and advocates for underserved communities for the last 30 years. Its large membership is comprised of physicians, pharmacists, nurses, scientists, and other healthcare professionals, as well as all individuals committed to enhancing the medical, social, and intellectual wellbeing of our communities by serving humanity.

Under this large umbrella, SIVU was inaugurated virtually on May 17, 2020. The inaugural lecture by renowned scholar, researcher, and academic Professor Dr. Bagher Larijani, held via Zoom, streamed to 20 000 homes across the globe.

The next few months were a whirlwind. Educators, academicians, teachers, scholars, and other experts

gathered on SIVU's platform. Momentum grew, and we emerged with our first international series of Workshops and Webinars in Medical Education.

A core group of seasoned Medical Educators, including myself, the Chancellor of SIVU, along with Vice Chancellor Dr. Mulazim Bukhari, Dr. Shoaleh Bigdeli of Iran, Dr. Tabassum Zehra of Pakistan, and Dr. Shahid Hassan of Malaysia came together to create a curriculum. Technical infrastructure and coordination were handled by Dr. Mubbashir Iftikhar of Malaysia and IMI's Global Coordinator, Shifa Abbas.

Biweekly webinars and workshops were held, becoming exceedingly popular with hundreds of participants from Canada and the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, Malaysia, Tanzania, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and India. Participants were given access to world-class educators along with opportunities for interaction and participation, networking opportunities, and the ability to earn certificates.

Virtual workshops held on Zoom allowed breakout rooms, whiteboard sharing, and short activities. Hundreds of participants pre-registered and joined for streamed sessions by Dr. Azim Mirzazadeh of Iran, Dr. John Sanders of the United Kingdom, and Dr. Kausar Ali and Dr. Rukhsana Zubeiri of Pakistan, to name a few.

By the end of 2020, SIVU had held over a dozen virtual events, with more than 5000 unique participants from over 25 countries. In 2021, we have already hosted two dozen webinars and workshops and three conferences.

In April of 2021, SIVU hosted a week-long E-Congress, a joining of minds and hearts from across the globe, engaging with world-class universities in a marathon learning experience. On April 5, 2021, the University of Kerbala College of Medicine co-hosted the University's 5th International Conference on Medical Education. It was at this conference that Dr. Husain Shabeh, a renowned cardiologist based in London took the oath as the Dean of Sadiq International Virtual University and

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Ms. Shifa Abbas as the Registrar. The full-day academic program culminated in a power-packed panel discussion on Medical Education reform in Iraq chaired by Professor Dr. Nigel Bax.

From April 6th to 8th, we joined hands with ERA University of Lucknow for a Virtual International conference for Health Professions Education – Health Professionals of Tomorrow: Agents of Educational Reforms. These sessions were credited with nine CME hours and were attended by hundreds of educators globally. The conference was made possible by the unrelenting support of our fellow Indian scholars, led by ERA University Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Farzana Mehdi.

On April 9th, we ended the week-long conference by hosting the Global Conference for Health Professional Educators with the American University of Barbados. Colleagues from Iran, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and beyond the Caribbean shores to South America and

Africa and the rest of the world came together. Hundreds of teachers, scholars, physicians, and students attended sessions exhibiting the true power of virtual learning.

What began as a small effort in a wave of despair has matured into a large enterprise. SIVU is currently working on offering accredited courses as well as a physical structure that will be based in Pakistan. Webinars and workshops continue, moving into fields of Public Health, Career Guidance, COVID-19 Information sessions and Clinical Workshops. Looking forward, SIVU will continue its weekly and biweekly sessions, updated on its website. SIVU, along with its umbrella organization, is hosting a hybrid physical and virtual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, USA from October 29 to 31, 2021. Please visit www.imamiamedics.com for more information.

The motto of SIVU remains “Enter to learn, go out to serve humanity,” and that is exactly what SIVU primes its students to do. Join us in our journey. Become a part of the future wave of virtual medical education today.