COVID-19: SURGICAL TRAINING IN CRISIS

Surgical simulation training is crucial in the covid-19 era and beyond

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Munro and colleagues list several strategies for mitigating the negative effects of the covid-19 pandemic on surgical training. Of these, developing simulation opportunities for trainees is of paramount importance.

The challenges of the pandemic have led to innovative developments expanding the role of simulation in ophthalmology. New rules around movement and social distancing have inspired adaptation of existing technology to allow remote supervision of simulation sessions. We are currently piloting a plan to incorporate remotely supervised (video linked) surgical simulation training into weekly deanery-wide teaching. Each trainee will be provided with simulation models and suturing equipment and can be supervised using a videoconferencing platform linked to a training microscope camera. A syllabus is being developed to cover essential surgical skills specified in the training curriculum.

Funding is an important consideration. An effective simulation programme will include both initial set-up costs (microscopes, equipment) and ongoing maintenance funds for consumables (model eyes, suture material). Sources of funding might include underused study leave budgets and charitable funds. When applying for funding, it might be useful to emphasise that simulation is cost effective and enhances patient safety (by reducing intraoperative complication rates in cataract surgery, for example).

We also advocate a culture of maximising cost effectiveness and minimising waste by reusing equipment for multiple simulated procedures.

These innovations can also be expanded beyond the covid-19 era. Trainees taking time out of training can be empowered, if they choose, to maintain and develop surgical skills through simulation when access to real life surgery is limited.

In these uncertain times, when further lockdowns remain a distinct possibility, it is crucial to work actively towards expanding simulation resources for surgical training. We encourage trainees to participate in developing simulation practices in their region and driving this initiative forward.

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Full response at: https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n659/rr-2

3 Royal College of Ophthalmologists. Remotely supervised simulated surgery webinar. 2021. URL link available on request.