

Impacts of COVID-19 on Medical Students

Cassandra Krier, Elizabeth Ellinas, MD, Katherine Quinn, PhD, Amy Farkas, MD, Kristina Kaljo, PhD
Medical College of Wisconsin

Introduction

COVID-19 had an impact on:

-  Cancellation of high stakes medical licensing exams
-  Limited shadowing or mentorship opportunities
-  Cancellation of clinical rotations

Study Aim

To determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on current medical students and their adaption to remote learning, and potential impacts on their professional development and future professional and personal decisions.

Methods

- This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW).
- Using qualitative methodology and semi-structured focus groups, medical students at MCW with an anticipated graduation in 2021, 2022, or 2023 were invited to participate.
- Eight groups were held virtually, with a range of two to six students each and a total of twenty students.
- Questions explored students' transition to remote learning during COVID-19, specialty choice, and students' goals.
- Focus groups were conducted during June – August 2020 via Webex, were video-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and participants were deidentified.
- Consensual qualitative analysis was performed to identify themes that addressed the study's specific aim.

Acknowledgments

Dr. Elaine Kohler Summer Academy of Global Health Research and the Medical College of Wisconsin Office of Global Health

Results

Consequence Cascade



2nd Year Medical Student on loss of shadowing;
“There is a concern at least on my end...to sort of get a better picture of “oh man, what am I really interested in?” before we have to select these electives for clerkships, that sort of pigeonhole you.”



3rd Year Medical Student on Step exam instability;
“I had to push my Step exam back three times...because the world was on fire!! And I couldn't focus!!”



4th Year Medical Student on residency placement;
“I feel like a lot of people are going to be left unmatched or matching to institutions where they potentially didn't want to go, or end up staying at their own institution.”

Changing Academic Expectations

Students express both a fear of the unknown and a fear of productivity expectations.



4th Year Medical Student on fear of the unknown;
“I think the hardest part was the day-to-day of not knowing what was going to happen.”

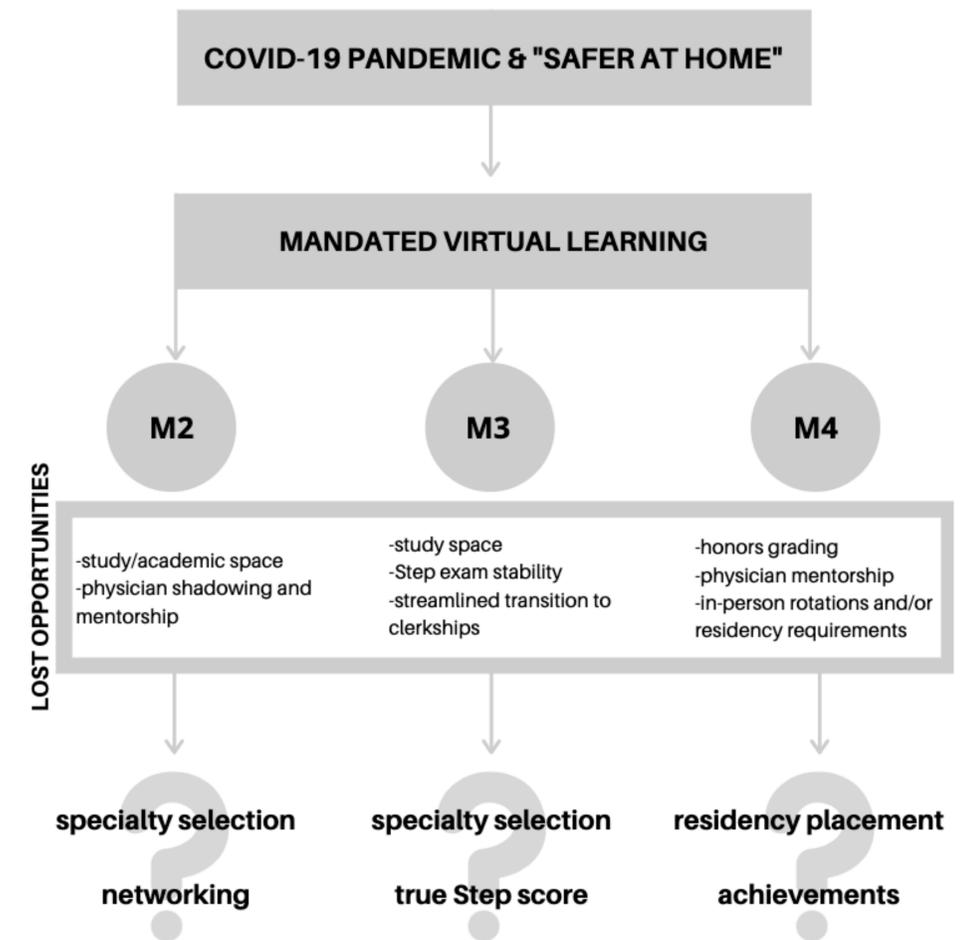
Community Relationships

Students who returned to their parents' or local community felt an increase in support and connection. Students were willing to change their wellness habits during virtual learning.



4th Year Medical Student on wellness;
“It sort of reaffirmed for me the importance of having hobbies, things outside medicine that you like to do...realize that medicine isn't everything.”

CONSEQUENCE CASCADE



Conclusion and Next Steps

Medical students described significant stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. Students also identified unforeseen benefits of COVID-19; such as increased wellness opportunities and time with family.

Bolster institutional communication

Increase resources for student wellness

Reflection on standardized examination