



Western Surgical Association 2020 Annual Meeting

Monday, November 9, 2020
4:00pm – 6:15pm Pacific Time
– Virtual Meeting --

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11. TEACHING EFFECTIVE INFORMED CONSENT COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE VIRTUAL SURGICAL CLERKSHIP

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Background: The disruption occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for a “natural” experiment to assess the impact of virtual curricular innovations in the surgery clerkship. We implemented a novel informed consent activity module with standardized patients to improve competence of communication skills. The virtual curriculum was designed with synchronous and asynchronous components, including a zoom session with standardized patients and faculty coaches. In this cohort study, we seek 1) to improve student competence in communication skills related to informed consent and 2) to explore advantages and shortcomings of a virtual communication curriculum.

Methods: All third year medical students who participated in the virtual surgery clerkship were recruited to participate in a retrospective survey about the informed consent module. Students who participated in the study completed a survey about competence related to informed consent communication skills before and after the activity. At the end of the virtual clerkship block, data was collected from small focus groups of students about their virtual curricular experience.

Results: After the first virtual surgery clerkship block, 16 out of the 52 students participated in the study (30% of cohort). Based on the survey, students who participated reported increased competence in communication skills related to informed consent. All student who participated in the study rated satisfactory or above for competence in identifying elements of an informed consent and common communication challenges. The students who participated in the focus group reported the informed consent activity as a positive experience.

Conclusion: We found that using a virtual module of standardized patients and faculty communication coaches improved students' competence in communication skills related to informed consent. Due to the COVID pandemic, a ‘split’ clerkship curriculum is a novel approach to the traditional third year medical school curriculum. This communication module can be useful in a virtual curricular structure for both current and future medical students in pandemic environment.