

Educational platform on thoracic surgery: further strategic possibilities

Kieran Walsh

Clinical Director, BMJ Learning, London, UK

Correspondence to: Dr. Kieran Walsh, FRCPI. BMJ Learning, BMJ Group, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JR, UK.

Email: kmwalsh@bmjgroup.com.

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Dear Editor,

Massard *et al.* have provided a fascinating insight into the European educational platform on thoracic surgery (1). Certainly the education provision (and their description of it) is comprehensive. Their plans for e-learning are still clearly in incubation, however there are a number of points that they could take into account in their e-learning strategy.

First of all e-learning of whatever form should not be created or viewed in isolation. E-learning provision should ideally be blended with face to face provision of medical education. It is ineffective and inefficient use of resources merely to reproduce face to face medical education in the online environment. Different media are likely to be useful in achieving different outcomes. For example in blended learning, applied knowledge and problem solving skills may be best transmitted via e-learning, and then professional attitudes developed in a small group educational setting. The end outcome will hopefully be a healthcare professional with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to deliver expertise in thoracic surgery.

Secondly the European Society could consider further how they might make the best use of the actual medium of e-learning. Technology is now so advanced that it seems inefficient to merely reproduce textbooks in an online

environment. Online simulations can enable thoracic surgeons to train and test their skills online—in a place where they cannot harm patients whilst they are practicing. The advent of virtual patients means that surgical trainees can practice their consultation skills online. There are apps available that can enable clinicians to practice a range of clinical skills online or offline. Software can enable the hosting of branching interactive case history narratives where learners can make their mistakes online and experience the consequences of their actions. Broadband internet access on mobile devices is now almost ubiquitous in Europe—the territory where the society will wish to have maximum impact. All these factors point to the fact that the society's strategy is correct—the only question that remains is whether they could go further and faster in the same direction.

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References

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