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Self-Directed Learning Perspectives of Final Year Health Professions Students

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Abstract

Self-directed learning (SDL) has been advocated for effective training of final year health professions students. COVID-19 challenges conventional teaching, learning, and assessment in the clinical environment. This study aimed to identify and explore enablers and barriers to SDL amongst final-year health professions students training during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) framework, this study explored the clinical learning and training experiences of final year health professions students during the pandemic. A survey was conducted via online platforms. Data from 155 respondents were thematically analyzed. Personal attributes such as reflection, self-determination, motivation, resilience, and positive learning behaviors and skills were identified as SDL enablers. Collaborative learning networks and online learning platforms facilitate learning needs and goals. Fear and anxiety, untrusted learning sites, uncertainty about graduation, financial issues and challenges in the learning environments were the major themes related to barriers to SDL. The importance of SDL as a skill for uncertain times warrants further investigation in the training of future health care professionals. Inclusive planning and engagement with final year health profession students to address identified stressors, as well as the creation of shared platforms where students are part of the decision-making processes for clinical learning and training are recommended. Responsive curricula that optimize unpredictable disruptions in clinical training are needed to equip students to diagnose their own learning needs and implement appropriate learning strategies.

Keywords: clinical training; competencies; learning environment; medical curriculum; undergraduate medical students