The future of healthcare education: traditional learning model vs. blended learning

The future of healthcare education will rely on virtual teaching models and online platforms. This is because the healthcare industry today faces complex challenges. It is not far-fetched to think about a novel hybrid model of healthcare education that will be designed to train healthcare professionals to deliver healthcare in a better and more effective manner. This is especially true for healthcare leaders who need to be more empowered to better address the needs of an industry that is expected to change treatment models, diagnostic tools and doctor-patient relationships in line with new strategies.

Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, value-based healthcare, personalised medicine and continuous advancement in mHealth will drive a similar change and advancement in healthcare education.

The fact is that e-learning or online learning is becoming increasingly popular for health education. The online learning model for a healthcare management degree, for example, offers future healthcare leaders the opportunity to develop in-demand expertise and begin and pursue a career in healthcare with flexibility. The age-old concept that students can only acquire key skills in an on-campus environment does not apply in this digital age. Healthcare management degree programmes online enable students to acquire relevant skills and knowledge in the field of healthcare, software, and technology in healthcare, patient partnerships, and population health management. In fact, these healthcare professions might be in a better position to tackle the challenges of an industry that is rapidly changing with changing technology.

Some major advantages of an e-learning model of education in healthcare include:

- The potential to transcend space and time boundaries
- Greater convenience and effectiveness for collaborative learning
- Use of interactive multimedia models to provide the necessary knowledge
- Flexibility to review electronic materials as often as required and at the pace that is comfortable for students

It is important to understand that hands-on-learning is part of healthcare training. However, if healthcare professionals utilise the many benefits offered by online learning, they can derive benefits from both the online learning model and the traditional learning model. In other words, this hybrid or blended learning opportunity is a definite plus for future healthcare professionals. Also, the fact that practical experience will still be a part of their overall learning, the concern that those who earn degrees through online platforms may feel isolated or have a reduced interest in the subject material is also better handled with the blended learning model.

Significant research has been conducted on the hybrid learning model in healthcare. Some of these studies examined the retention rates of online/hybrid courses and discovered that the retention rates among students were much higher as compared to the traditional classroom formats. It is important, however, to define the concept of hybrid learning as investigated by these studies. Hybrid courses are those where "instructional material is offered through the online sessions, allowing students to work through examples, and in-class time is spent providing an overview of the content."

However, the effective implementation of online learning, hybrid learning or blended learning, whichever concept suits you best, is to ensure that the courses are designed appropriately and that they are aligned with the students' preferred learning strategies. Moreover, healthcare professionals of the future are already in tune with the technological change in both education and healthcare so it is safe to assume that a self-directed learning approach will not be something that they would resist or fear. The ultimate goal should be to create a learning platform where healthcare students can contribute, participate, learn and achieve.

It is safe to conclude that despite apprehensions regarding online education in healthcare, several studies have shown that student perception, concept retention, and skills development is as effective with online learning models as it is with traditional learning models. However, practical experience in healthcare is still important, but this can be easily blended into healthcare degree programmes and healthcare courses once healthcare students have completed their basic courses online. Healthcare leaders of tomorrow will not necessarily be those who have a traditional classroom education but will be those who know how to use, implement and apply technology in healthcare.

Sources: Healthcare, Journal of Medical Internet Research , Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
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