The year is 2155. Tommy finds a 'real book' written by his grandfather about his days of school. Tommy was excited and shared this exciting concept of ‘school’ with his sister Margie. He was 13, and she was 11. It was so interesting to them because they never knew what a school was and had their entire education online through computers. It’s about a short story, ‘The Fun they had’ written by Isaac Asimov. I had this lesson in my English textbooks during my school days. I never knew that this concept of ‘online classes’ comes true so early and that too in the 5-inch devices.

The first thing I did as soon as the holidays were announced was to pack my bag to go home. I was under the wrong impression that I would be back in 15 days and didn’t bother to take all my second-year textbooks with me. I thought to enjoy those 15 days and to start studying when I get back to college after a fortnight. And here we are. It has been more than 150 days, and we still have no clue when we are going back to the college.

Spending those initial 15 days of holidays was fun. But later, when the lockdown got extended, I had a mixed feeling of anxiety and joy. I was happy because I could stay at home for a longer time but anxious about my studies, which didn’t progress much for almost a month. Being in a medical institution, our teachers knew that this pandemic would not end soon and that they have to make something about the academics to continue as waiting for the issue to get resolved is just like waiting for rain in the desert. This is when our college without campus started.

Initially, when I was told about the idea of starting online classes, I was in for a big surprise. I thought it would be impossible to cope up with this as we never had classes without a teacher in front of us. The institution tried very hard to give us the best education possible and made sure that we were comfortable with quarantined online learning. Whatsapp groups were created separately for each department, which included all the staff and students. Initially, the presentation, along with the narration attached to each slide, followed by the assessment, was sent to us, which was an effective way of learning. The advantage over the classroom teaching was to study the sent recorded concepts at the time we concentrate the most. It may be early in the morning or late at night or anytime in the day. After a few initial days, the live sessions started. Various platforms were tried, and the best one was selected to continue. The practical sessions also started online. The slides were uploaded on a website where we could view any magnification. And this was coupled with an explanation by our mentors. In this way, our teachers made sure that we did not have a burden to attend a large number of practical sessions at once when we returned. And now, most of the theory and practical syllabus of the second year is completed. Some of the departments are even conducting the revision classes for complex and challenging concepts. I feel that the students have a lot of time at their disposal to study everything from the beginning and also revise.

The most important thing I learned during the online teaching period was to study the concepts and apply it clinically, which was made possible by the MCQ assessments and case studies given following each class through Google forms. The answers to these questions were provided after the submission of assignments so that we could correct our mistakes. This was an effective way of delivering remediation. A copy of the responses, with the answers,
were mailed to us so that we could refer it to whenever needed. I found the difference in the way I studied before this online learning and after it. The concepts studied before this was to reproduce the same in the internals and tests. But it changed as we were exposed to case scenarios and objective types of questions. The monthly tests of the subjective pattern were also conducted by some of the departments and this helped us not to lose our habit of writing. The online internals were conducted appreciably. We were continuously monitored throughout the session with our cameras and mics on and were asked to scan the answer scripts using a different phone not to interrupt the video and audio, thereby reducing the chances of malpractices.

Whatever it may, online teaching is not superior to traditional classrooms where we interact with the teachers directly, make group discussions with friends, and argue to prove my point is better than others and to disperse after making terrific useful academic discussions. The network issues hinder all the matters mentioned above to come true when done online. Interruption in mid of the live class due to network issues not only distracts me but also I lose my attendance if it is taken during that time. And studying in PDFs is another challenging task as I never did this before especially during the time of tests and internals. In the internals and tests, which included the subjective type of questions in which I write in sheets and scan and then upload, even though the time of uploading is within the deadline, the time of reaching them may cross the submission time due to network issues. There is a high chance of not considering the answer scripts in such cases. But when we have issues, we reach out to the teachers with the problems. Even though they couldn’t solve all our problems, they did their best to sort those.

The feedback system in the institution is working very well. It is the best mode to convey our opinions and to give suggestions. The happy thing is that every suggestion or problem was discussed and sorted out. Also, feedback forms were provided to us prior to making any decisions or initiating a new method of learning to know our opinions regarding the same. As there was a problem of interruption during the live class, the presentations of the class were shared with us after the class to go through in case if we had missed anything in the class. Regarding the attendance issues, arrangements were made for automated capture of attendance by the learning management system and not considering the number of times I exited and joined the class but based on the duration of the time I attended the class. As studying from PDFs was a challenging task, some of the departments limited the portions to that which were covered online and excluded the ones covered before. This was truly helpful as studying in the presentations given by the teachers is way much better than learning from PDFs. I completed my second internals without much stress and now do not have the burden of attending two internals at once when I return.

I feel that the recorded sessions will be better than the live classes as I can study at any time and with a gap in case if I’m distracted. Also, if I wanted to listen to the class again, I could do it any number of times as the attached audio gives me the feeling of listening to the class in the classroom. Also, it is better to allow us to write our records in the sheets and paste it in the records once we return. Some of the departments have agreed but it would be helpful if all the departments agree to this. So that we concentrate on our clinical postings when we return to the college rather than completing the records pending from the past six months.

With the sincere efforts of all the staff, I would say that we are getting the best education possible during this lockdown time. I learned the concepts in depth during this time as we were given case studies and objective type of questions as an assessment rather than to reproduce the textbook in answering the subjective type of questions. This made me study the concepts apart from those in the ‘Saviour of Medical Students’ - Singi question bank. But the major one I missed during this period is the clinical postings, which is the heart of medical education. I wish all the hard times will end soon so that I will be able to return from the college without the campus to my’ second home’ – the college campus to meet my buddies, my’ second parents’ and last but not the least, ‘tutors of the doctors; patients’.

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