

# Organizing Online Faculty Development Programs to Strengthen Medical Education in India: Need of the Hour

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## Abstract

There is an immense need to improve the skills of curricula delivery by training medical teachers. There arises the need to periodically train teachers through faculty development programs (FDPs). In fact, FDPs in the field of medical education have been acknowledged as an important component for the acquisition of skills for new faculty, for refinement of skills, and for better delivery of the medical curriculum. The implementation of online FDPs is a better option for improving the skills of medical teachers. These programs expose faculty to the domain of e-learning, which in itself is an important domain in medical education. However, the existing challenges in the smooth conduction of online FDPs cannot be ignored, and we have to support the staff in the smooth organization of these much-needed courses. In conclusion, online FDPs have the potential to enhance the skills and transform the effectiveness of medical teachers in their teaching–learning sessions and in their professional careers. Amidst the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, it has become the need of the hour to conduct a series of online FDPs and empower faculty members in the domains of teaching–learning, assessment, research, curriculum planning, and evaluation.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus disease 2019, faculty development programs, online learning

## INTRODUCTION

There is an immense need to improve the skills of curricula delivery by training medical teachers. There arises the need to periodically train teachers through faculty development programs (FDPs). FDPs in the field of medical education have been acknowledged as an important component for the acquisition of skills for new faculty, for refinement of skills, and for better delivery of the medical curriculum.<sup>[1]</sup> FDPs organized by the medical education unit are scheduled during working hours, forcing faculty participants to compromise their clinical work during that time. In addition, FDPs have a limited number of slots available, requiring additional resources to duplicate the course to allow for the entirety of faculty to be trained.<sup>[2-4]</sup>

Owing to the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, as a part of the response plan and in order to reduce the transmission of the infection, multiple interventions have been taken by policymakers. One of these interventions has been the closure of all educational institutions, including medical schools. This decision has significantly

impacted the curriculum delivery and the only way to restore the education in these difficult times is through the conduction of online teaching–learning and assessments.<sup>[5]</sup> However, not everyone can take online sessions, and there is an immense need to organize online FDPs to make the faculty competent and thus subsequently pass on the information to students.<sup>[5]</sup>

## ONLINE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: SCOPE AND NEED

The implementation of online FDPs is a superior option for

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improving the skills of medical educators. These programs expose faculty to the domain of e-learning, which in itself is an important domain in medical education. Online FDPs have been linked with multiple benefits, such as ameliorating accessibility issues that may arise from geographical challenges. In addition, owing to the component of flexibility, participants can learn at their own pace. This creates opportunity for faculty members who are unable to participate in routine sessions due to excessive workload.<sup>[2-4]</sup>

Moreover, it is high time that the focus of administrators should be shifted toward online FDPs as they are visually appealing, aid in obtaining comprehensive feedback, and provide opportunities for reflections. Further, FDPs envisage reinforcement of best practices, enable better communication, and aid in the development of leadership qualities among the resource person and participants. Moreover, these FDPs are an effective tool to ensure capacity building and warrant that participants develop control over e-learning tools.<sup>[3,4]</sup> In addition, online programs give opportunity for self-directed learning, introspection of the faculty members, and neutralizing inhibitions; are cost-effective (such as more number of faculty members can attend as per their convenience and it becomes easy to store and retrieve the proceedings); and can be more appealing through periodic assessment and feedbacks. In the long run, it can act as a strategy for better retention of the faculty members in the institution as they can plan their own professional growth and become lifelong learners.<sup>[3,4,6]</sup>

In the process of successful implementation of competency-based curriculum for the medical undergraduate courses, online FDPs can significantly help in improving the competence level of faculty members regardless of the geographical settings.<sup>[1,2,4]</sup> These online FDP sessions can aid in the planning, scheduling of timetables, and implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the sessions will help in improving the skills of faculty in mentoring and conducting educational research and improve the art of giving feedback. Further, the faculty members can be more confident to adopt different forms of teaching–learning methods and not only rely on didactic lectures. A wide range of courses such as Advance Course in Medical Education, Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research Fellowship, and a certificate course by the National Programme on Technology-Enhanced Learning are available for the benefit of faculty members.<sup>[7,8]</sup>

In addition, different social media tools such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and YouTube can be utilized for the conduction of various online FDPs to improve the cognitive, skill, and communication domains of the faculty members.<sup>[6]</sup> Moreover, there are various apps available such as Kahoot, Quizziz, Poll Everywhere, Google Forms, Google Classrooms, and Learning Management software, all of which can significantly improve the learners' engagement.

## EXISTING CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Despite the presence of multiple merits which can be

attributed to online FDPs, the challenges linked with the smooth conduction of these online sessions need to be duly acknowledged. The challenges include inexperience with technology, inadequate training of faculty, lack of familiarity with online pedagogies, resistance from faculty members to change, and involved infrastructure and costs.<sup>[7]</sup> These challenges can be tackled by providing technical and pedagogical assistance to faculty members, which act as a strong motivating factor to attend the online FDP sessions and implement the gained knowledge in the subsequent teaching–learning sessions.<sup>[9]</sup>

Even though online FDPs play an important role in improving the competence level of faculty members, these programs cannot significantly aid in the process of classroom management and develop punctuality and discipline among the staff members. Further, the college administration should also encourage faculty members to participate in a greater number of online FDPs to improve their professional competence and may consider these courses for deciding their professional growth.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

## ROLE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION UNITS

The medical education units of all the medical colleges have a defining role to play in order to organize online FDPs. In fact, their role starts right from the time of needs assessment, wherein efforts are taken to ascertain in which faculty members of all departments need guidance and training. Accordingly, the medical education unit does all the groundwork (viz., selection of appropriate date and convenient time, formulation of learning objectives for the session, selection of the right resource person, development of feedback form and pre- and posttest forms, and arrangement of required logistics) and ensures that the participants are benefited the most.

The Medical Education Unit of Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, a constituent unit of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Puducherry, has been a dynamic unit and has been actively involved in the process of capacity building via conduction of both traditional and online FDPs. In fact, the Medical Education Unit organized a national-level FDP-cum-Workshop on Application of Technology for Implementation of Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME), wherein more than 250 faculty members from across the nation registered and got benefited on the different aspects of online assessment in CBME. The FDP-cum-Workshop received loads of positive feedback from the participants for the content, hands-on demonstration, and the overall organization. In fact, we received multiple inputs for the conduction of similar workshops for the benefit of faculty members from those medical colleges, which are still in initial stages.

## CONCLUSION

Online FDPs have the potential to enhance the skills and transform the effectiveness of medical teachers in their teaching–learning sessions and in their professional careers.

Amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it has become the need of the hour to conduct a series of online FDPs and empower faculty members in the domains of teaching–learning, assessment, research, curriculum planning, and evaluation.

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#### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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## ملخص المقال باللغة العربية

تنظيم برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس عبر الإنترنت لتقوية التعليم الطبي في الهند: حاجة الساعة

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هناك حاجة ملحة لتحسين مهارات تقديم المناهج (التدريس) من خلال تدريب معلمي الطب. هناك حاجة لتدريب المعلمين بشكل دوري من خلال برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس (FDPs). في الواقع، تم الاعتراف ببرامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مجال التعليم الطبي كعنصر مهم لاكتساب المهارات لأعضاء هيئة التدريس الجدد، وصقل هذه المهارات، وتقديم أفضل للمناهج الطبية. كما يعد تنفيذ برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس عبر الإنترنت خيارًا أفضل لتحسين مهارات معلمي الطب. تعرض هذه البرامج عبر مجال التعلم الإلكتروني، والذي يعد في حد ذاته مجالًا مهمًا في التعليم الطبي. ومع ذلك، لا يمكن تجاهل التحديات الحالية في التوصليل السلس لبرامج تطوير المهارات عبر الإنترنت، وعلينا دعم الموظفين في التنظيم السلس لهذه الدورات التي تشهد الحاجة إليها. في الختام، لدى برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس عبر الإنترنت القدرة على تعزيز المهارات وتحويل فاعلية معلمي الطب في جلسات التدريس والتعلم وفي حياتهم المهنية. في خضم جائحة فيروس كورونا 2019 (COVID-19) المستمر، أصبح من الضروري إجراء سلسلة من برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس عبر الإنترنت وتمكين أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مجالات التدريس والتعلم والتقييم والبحث وتخطيط المناهج الدراسية والتقييم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مرض فيروس كورونا 2019، برامج تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس، التعلم عبر الإنترنت.