

Am I in a virtual medical school? - First year undergraduate medical students reflecting on online education during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction: Universiti Malaya implemented full virtual teaching and learning activities for Year 1 students to avoid deferment in their studies. Subsequently, Year 1 students had no physical orientation week and did not have the opportunity to experience study life on campus. Students only met their classmates online and were unable to create physical bonding among themselves. **Methods:** At the end of Year 1, students performed a written reflection on their learning experience, guided by Kolb's reflective cycle (i.e., experience, reflect, conceptualise, apply). They described either a good or bad experience, expressed feelings, indicated lessons learnt, and suggested implications to begin Year 2 with. **Results:** The analysis showed that students were juggling to balance their studies and life at the same time. Whereas some of them were grateful for the opportunity to enjoy solitudes in the comfort of being at their own home. The most common feedback was they felt unmotivated and lost focus as a possible result of being away from campus. As online teaching and learning continued, some of them drifted in anxiety and FOMO (Fear of missing out). Hence, these students were adapting a complete virtual campus as Year 1 medical students. Meanwhile, students were not exposed to hands-on physical examination, and hence they might have low confidence level. On the other hand, these students had more screen time as they needed to revise all the teaching materials using their electronic devices. Over-screen time might adversely affect the students' behaviours and their academic understanding, and it could result in poor academic performance. Students might also experience negative psychological outcomes (e.g., lack of motivation, anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms). **Conclusion:** The plan is for Year 1 students to obtain online COVID Preparedness Certificate (CPC) before they are allowed to come back to the physical campus in continuing their medical studies.

(300 words)

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