



CORRESPONDENCE

Comment on: 'Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research activities of UK ophthalmologists'

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the COVID-19 pandemic on the research activities of undergraduates, are welcomed.


TO THE EDITOR:

Hogg et al. have explored the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research activities of UK ophthalmologists [1]. Their survey, distributed to members of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the research of 91.2% (104 out of 114) of research-active respondents. This included a loss of research time ($n=69$), research delays ($n=96$) and funding shortfalls ($n=63$). This is likely to have negatively impacted the opportunities for interested medical students and trainees to become involved in ophthalmic research.

Undergraduate involvement in ophthalmic research has numerous benefits for academic institutions, supervisors, medical students and the wider scientific community. Through undertaking research projects, students can gain research skills, mentorship and a deeper insight into a career in Ophthalmology. The latter is increasingly important given that 72% of UK medical school Ophthalmology placements last one week or less in duration [2] and the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced clinical exposure in Ophthalmology [3]. Furthermore, research outputs enhance students' and trainees' portfolios, enabling them to make competitive applications for Ophthalmology training in the future.

As medical students in our clinical years during the COVID-19 pandemic, we appreciate the impact of the pandemic on clinical exposure in Ophthalmology and consequent opportunities to meet potential supervisors. With fewer ophthalmologists conducting research during the pandemic, there are likely to be fewer opportunities for interested medical students.

A potential solution to increase high-quality research outputs, whilst involving medical students in research, is to harness the power of collaborative learning and develop an undergraduate research network with appropriate supervision [4]. Furthermore, there is currently a lack of research exploring the perceived barriers to undergraduate research involvement in the UK [5]. Future studies investigating the enablers and barriers to medical student involvement in ophthalmic research, and the impact of

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JM wrote the manuscript. SM reviewed and edited the manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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