

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the disruption of many aspects of medical services, including medical education. This has vast implications for doctors undergoing postgraduate training to become specialists, especially in a setting where this much-needed expertise is currently lacking. However, it has also presented an opportunity for innovation to the traditional model of delivering postgraduate medical training in west Africa. We sought to capture the experiences of trainees and trainers of postgraduate medical colleges in West Africa and assess their preferences for the mode of delivery of future training courses.

Methods

This was a cross-sectional online survey of trainees and trainers of postgraduate medical colleges in West Africa between May-July 2020. We collected quantitative and qualitative data on their preferences for virtual versus face-to-face modes of delivering future training courses and explored the reasons for these preferences.

Results

There were 614 respondents from eight West African countries comprising 430 trainees (40% females) and 184 trainers (38% females). Over a third of respondents were physicians. More than half of respondents (56%) preferred virtual over face-to-face for future training courses; this was similar for trainees (56%) and trainers (56%). Reasons for preferring virtual over face-to-face training were that it was safer (86%), cheaper for the trainees (57%) and allowed the individuals to stay close to family (56%) and work (56%). Reasons for preferring the face-to-face modes included the opportunity to be familiar with the trainers (37%), other trainees (32%), and exam centres (16%). Most respondents recognised that going forward, trainees and trainers should be able to choose from both options.

Conclusions

More respondents preferred virtual over the face-to-face mode of delivering future training courses. While training will not completely switch to virtual mode, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that virtual mode will play a substantial role in delivering future postgraduate medical training courses.