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Disrupting Medical Education to Train the Clinicians of the Future

Abstract:

Disruptive innovation in medical education is sorely needed and long overdue. The basic structure of medical school curricula and postgraduate clinical training has largely remained the same over the past century, but a confluence of factors means that the time for change has finally come.

The growing consumerization of health care over the past two decades has changed patient expectations in how, where, and from whom to obtain health care. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the demand for telemedicine and other virtual care and “self-service” tools. New technologies based on artificial intelligence and computer vision are rapidly replacing the skills previously deemed necessary to practice medicine. We must educate a health care workforce capable of meeting the needs of patients in a future where traditional health care providers and brick and mortar facilities are no longer the initial points of care.

Beyond training these new types of clinicians, the institutions of medical education must change themselves. Online learning in the 21st century has evolved rapidly, introducing highly customizable, affordable, and convenient platforms to help students from all ages and areas of need. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online education tools out of necessity, but many of the changes undertaken may indeed become permanent for all students going forward. This shift away from physical classrooms may actually be a blessing for medical education programs, as it could usher in changes that advocates for medical education reform have been pushing for many years. These include a competency-based (rather than time-based) approach to medical education and better integration between basic sciences education and clinical training. Yet another benefit may be to keep medical education more affordable so that health care can continue to draw from the best and brightest students from all socioeconomic areas.

Rapidly evolving technologies, shifting consumer demand, and the COVID-19 pandemic have all forced myriad industries to reinvent their business models to prepare for a new future. Medical education must do the same.