connect*ed: The evolution of a virtual community of learning on a social media platform

Abstract:

Beginning in 2018-19, the entire third-year class of medical students at the LKS Faculty of Medicine embarked on a mandatory, credit-bearing Enrichment Year with a focus of their own choosing. The range of learning experiences and geographic distance posed a challenge for students to remain in academic contact and to access social support. 38 small groups comprised of one faculty mentor + six students formed connect*ed, a virtual community of learning. The aim was to link diverse student experiences with the common goal of being a doctor through structured learning activities and to offer an avenue for mutual support. A proprietary social media application was adapted as the learning and communication e-platform. Students achieved the desired learning outcomes but structured online learning on a social media platform was a challenge. connect*ed was more effective and better received as a network for informal sharing and social support. Mentors were a crucial link in the support network that became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. connect*ed can take advantage of the strengths of virtual communities of learning and re-focus on supporting non-academic learning needs while providing social support. [connect*ed website: https://connected.hku.hk/ ]