

Technology-enhanced learning should be employed alongside – not instead of – bedside teaching

Zachary Ferguson

South Thames Foundation School,
London, UK

Dear editor

I read with great interest the editorial by Al-jibury et al¹ regarding the digitalization of medical education, particularly as I was part of the team that produced the YouTube video on heart murmurs which they reference in their paper.

I agree wholeheartedly that digital resources cannot and must not replace bedside teaching. The video in question carries a disclaimer at the beginning, encouraging learners to use the resource as a companion to – not a substitute for – real-life patient contact. Convenient though YouTube might be, it cannot compare to the learning experience Al-jibury et al¹ describes: listening to a live, beating heart. Bedside teaching has been around since the days of Hippocrates and it is not going anywhere anytime soon.

Technology's role lies elsewhere. Innovative, interactive learning platforms allow engagement on a level which textbooks cannot compete with. A corpus of specialist knowledge too massive for anyone to memorize is now readily available via the smartphone in your pocket. This can only make medicine more accessible not only to the specialist but to the patient on the other side of the stethoscope. YouTube is many things, but an Ivory Tower it is not.

The art now is in how we use this knowledge. We have moved away from the traditional school of thought, where wisdom is a commodity passed from master to apprentice. Tomorrow's doctors ought to take a more constructivist approach. They should be encouraged to have meaningful clinical experiences, to seek out the resources they need to contextualize these and – where these cannot be found – to create new resources themselves.

One need only look at the success of Geeky Medics² – a site where students are encouraged not only to access innovative new content but also create their own. This is an opportunity rarely afforded by lectures or textbooks. While quality control remains an issue for open platforms like YouTube, the capacity for active learning and innovative practice is intriguing at the very least.

Medicine has moved on since 3,000 BCE and I think medical education has too. After all, does the Hippocratic oath not instruct us to teach “by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction?” I will have to credit Wikipedia for knowing that though.

Disclosure

The author is a member of a team producing YouTube resources, but he receives no financial remuneration for this. The author reports no other conflicts of interest in this communication.

Correspondence: Zachary Ferguson
Tunbridge Wells Hospital, Tonbridge Road,
Pembury, Kent TN2 4QJ, UK
Email zacharyferguson@doctors.org.uk

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