

ABSTRACT

Background

Globally, clinical training programmers have adopted several strategies in response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, including reorganizing the provision of care and safeguarding the well-being of trainees. This study aimed to describe the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on surgical training programmers in Africa.

Methods

We conducted a cross-sectional survey through an online questionnaire distributed via email to all College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA) trainees and faculty. Input regarding experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic was sought, including perceptions about personal protective equipment (PPE), organizational changes impacting training, use of e-learning platforms, reactions to the pandemic, and measures taken by institutions to combat COVID-19. Descriptive statistics were utilized, along with comparisons between faculty and trainee experiences. P values ≤ 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Results

Including 78 faculty members (31.6%), 247 participants completed the survey, and 175 believed they had been supplied with sufficient information regarding COVID-19 and the relevant PPE (71.7% of 244 who responded to this questionnaire item). The PPE components that were reported as most available were face masks (n=239, 96.8%), gloves (n=236, 95.5%), and body gowns (n=178, 72.1%). Most of the respondents (n=212, 85.8%) had learning reorganized at their centres due to the pandemic. Forty-two participants (17.0%) reported being exposed to COVID-19. Two respondents (0.8%) reported testing positive for COVID-19, but both were asymptomatic. About half of the respondents (n=122, 49.4%) used the existing COSECSA e-learning platform in the same manner as before the pandemic, and 174 participants (70.4%) suggested that COSECSA should implement a different examination format given the circumstances.

Conclusions

COSECSA training centres have adopted measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, the pandemic has already adversely affected staff and patients. The centres should increase access to information about COVID-19 and enhance infection protection practices. Likewise, COSECSA should enrich online educational platforms and consider alternative examination formats.

Keywords: COVID-19, surgical residency, surgery training, personal protective equipment, e-learning, Africa