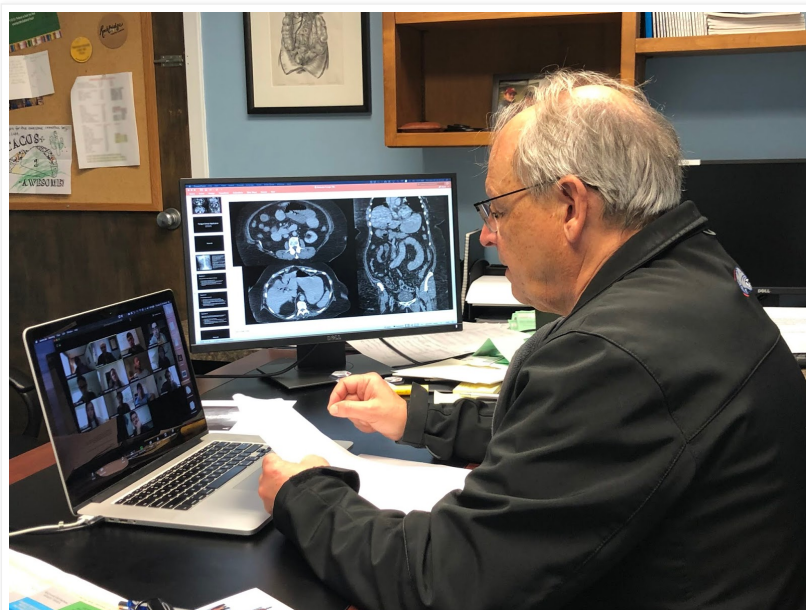


Med School Watercooler

NEWS FROM FREDERICK P. WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Thursday, March 26, 2020

Technology and creativity allow medical students to continue education



William Richards, M.D., professor and chair of surgery, gives a team-based learning exercise to third-year surgery clerkship students online using the Zoom platform.

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, classes at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine have transitioned to an online learning format. One example is the use of technology by faculty and third-year clerkship students as they continue an important progression in their medical school education.

"Our goal, while online, is to continue to deliver a high-quality educational experience to provide students the medical knowledge necessary to care for patients when they are able to resume clinical activity," said T.J. Hundley, M.D., associate dean of medical education at the USA College of Medicine.

During the third year of medical school, USA medical students participate in clerkships in family medicine, internal medicine, neurology, OB-GYN, pediatrics, psychiatry and surgery. The clerkships form the foundation of the third year of medical school in which medical students use knowledge gained from their preclinical years and begin to apply it in the real world with real patients, under the direction of resident and attending physicians. The goal is to form them into competent physicians able to function in the real world and ready to move on to residency.

The surgical clerkship students recently received their first team-based learning (TBL) exercise from William Richards, M.D., F.A.C.S., professor and chair of surgery, through the Zoom online conferencing application. TBL involves a lecture and then an interactive case study based on a clinical scenario, according to John Hunter, M.D., F.A.C.S., assistant professor of surgery, who is co-director the

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surgery clerkship along with Linda Ding, M.D., F.A.C.S., assistant professor of surgery.

Typically, these students would spend the majority of their time in the hospital, so the online format is a change, but this format allows them to continue all of their lectures and small group sessions. The students are also still able to directly interact with faculty and ask questions.

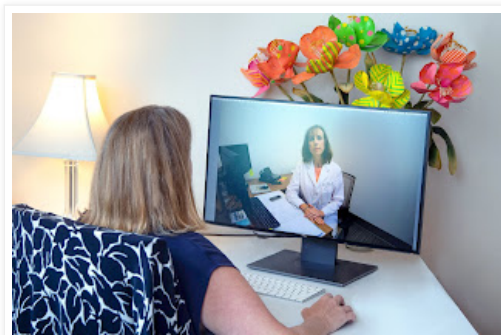
"This is a crucial time in these students' medical career," Hunter said. "It's important that they continue their educational activities despite not being able to be inside the hospital."

Hunter said the online classes have gone smoothly for both the faculty and the students. He credits Julie Estis, Ph.D., director of academic enhancement at USA and a team-based learning collaborative certified trainer-consultant, and the USA Innovation in Learning Center staff for helping to quickly educate the faculty on the new technology.

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USA Health launches virtual visits for new and existing patients

USA College of Medicine employees can take advantage of USA Health's enhanced virtual visit option for new and established patients with basic medical needs. The virtual visits can be for initial consultations, post-operation follow-ups, and other health needs that don't require an in-person visit.



Virtual visits are patient appointments conducted by using audio-visual technologies such as a smart phone with video capabilities that allow a patient and a healthcare provider to interact without physical contact. Participants must have an email address and computer or phone with a camera to take part.

Shelby Smith, director of care access at USA Health, said healthcare providers and staff members have been quick to respond to the need of moving to virtual visits.

"By moving quickly, it has allowed us to demonstrate the commitment to our patients, community and USA Health employees that the safety and well-being of all is of highest priority," Smith said. "When the dust settles, I am confident that the insights our health system has learned through this rapid response to operationalize virtual visits will help us further develop a great long-term telemedicine strategy."

To make an appointment or schedule a virtual visit, call (251) 434-3711.

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Mukherjee discusses the importance of mindfulness during crisis

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In times of stress, our bodies go into fight-or-flight mode. By practicing mindfulness each day, we can reduce our stress and increase our happiness. In doing so, we can become better students, teachers and healthcare providers.

"We are in a very uncertain environment right now," said Binata Mukherjee, M.D., director of healthcare leadership initiatives at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

Mukherjee describes this environment as VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. "When we have a huge pandemic like COVID-19, for medical educators and healthcare workers, it can make VUCA even stronger."

During crisis, cortisol floods the brain and stimulates the amygdala, the "alarm bell" or emotional hub of the brain, she explained. Cortisol also kills the neurons in the hippocampus, which would normally help to calm down the amygdala.

"This state is often referred to as the 'amygdala hijack,'" she said. "We lose our ability to think clearly and are often taken over by emotions."

One of the best ways to reduce these feelings of distress is to practice experiential mindfulness. Mukherjee describes it as paying attention to our actual experiences – what is actually happening right now – and noticing the push-and-pull quality of our experiences.

"Something that is pleasant in our experience, we want to continue and so we try to hold on to it. Something unpleasant, we want to go away so we try to push it away," she said. "Mindfulness is paying attention, noticing that push and pull."

When we bring awareness to our situations, Mukherjee said, we can avoid being "sucked into them."

"We can simply *be* with them. When we are not caught up, there is tremendous relief for the mind," she said.

Mindfulness may be practiced in a variety of ways, including meditation, yoga, taking a walk, or breathing exercises.

Mukherjee offers the following resources for practicing mindfulness:

1. The USA Recreation Center hosts [virtual meditation sessions via Zoom](#) on Tuesdays at 4:30 p.m. People are welcome to join any time they are available and are not obliged to stay for the entire duration. Sessions are facilitated by Binata Mukherjee, M.D., and Nena Nimit, M.D.
2. Healthline: [Box Breathing](#)
3. Institute for Healthcare Improvement: [10 Mindfulness Exercises for the Health Care Workplace](#)
4. Institute for Healthcare Improvement: [Incorporating Mindfulness Into Clinical Practice \(Online Course\)](#)

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