

Virtual learning opportunity during COVID-19 Pandemic: Comparison of virtual (2021) and face to face (2019) conferences of Turkish Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases

Önder Ergönül^{1,2,3} , Rabia Ünal^{1,4} , Alpay Azap^{1,5} , Serap Şimşek-Yavuz^{1,6} 

¹ Turkish Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (KLİMİK), İstanbul, Turkey

² Koç University- İşbank Research Center for Infectious Diseases, İstanbul, Turkey

³ Department of Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology, Koç University School of Medicine, İstanbul, Turkey

⁴ Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Yıldız Technical University Faculty of Education, İstanbul, Turkey

⁵ Department of Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology, Ankara University School of Medicine, Ankara, Turkey

⁶ Department of Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology, İstanbul University İstanbul School of Medicine, İstanbul, Turkey

About the last 10-year if not older, electronic learning as a training method in infectious diseases (ID) and clinical microbiology (CM) was defined as an area to be improved. In a survey published in 2017 by the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID), it was reported that e-learning methods were experienced by only a minority of the respondents and 43.5% of CM and 44.5% of ID trainees wanted to have more e-learning opportunities (1). Most respondents considered training in e-learning systems and continuing medical education programs insufficient (1). The survey was performed before the pandemic and identified the limited use of modern learning methods such as e-learning in CM/ID training programs, which contrasts with other medical fields, where distance learning is widespread.

By the end of 2019, an unexpected COVID-19 pandemic emerged, and the scientific meetings were performed de facto as virtual. While we were fighting against the pandemic at our clinics and laboratories, we had to adapt our scientific and professional interactions in many ways (2). such a historical story of resilience provided some valuable and unique experiments. We compared 2019 face to face (F2F) and 2021 virtual conferences and aimed to get some lessons for the future.

Corresponding Author:
Önder Ergönül

E-mail:
oergonul@ku.edu.tr

Received: Aralık 17, 2021
Accepted: Aralık 24, 2021
Published: December 30, 2021

Suggested citation:
Ergönül Ö, Ünal R, Azap A, Şimşek-Yavuz S. Virtual learning opportunity during COVID-19 pandemic: comparison of virtual (2021) and face to face (2019) conferences of Turkish Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. *Infect Dis Clin Microbiol* 2021; 3: 177-179.

DOI: 10.36519/idcm.2021.112

Before the pandemic, the benefits of distance learning were described particularly as having the possibility to study at one's own pace and being followed by residents located at multiple sites. However, virtual learning opportunities during the pandemic gifted some lessons. The scientific quality of virtual meetings was similar to F2F meetings in terms of invited speakers, the content of the talks, and coverage of the topics in the field (3). The sessions of the virtual conference were on time, although F2F the sessions were sometimes prolonged. The technical capacity of virtual meetings increased significantly since the beginning of the pandemic (Table 1).

Missing socialization and F2F interaction were the most significant complaints coming from the participants. However, in terms of interaction, we observed that the participants were more comfortable asking questions to the speakers in virtual meetings. We should also note that the increase in social media use could be associated with virtual meetings. In 2020 and 2021, we got some lessons from the virtual conferences, and during 2022, we will implement hybrid examples in certain areas.

Table 1. Comparison of face to face (F2F) conference of 2019 and virtual conference of 2021.

	2019 (The 20th Annual Conference) F2F	2021 (The 21st Annual Conference) Virtual
Conference metrics		
Number of total sessions	25	47
Conference	2	2
Number of speakers	184	292
Number of participants	602	824
Number of presentations		
oral	39	131
poster	386	492
Number of simultaneous sessions	3	4
Timing for sessions	07:00-18:00	15:00-22:00
Performance outcomes		
Timeliness	Prolonged meetings	All were timely
Cost	High	Low
asking questions to the speakers	Uncomfortable	More comfortable and increased
Interaction for networking	Effective	Not effective
Scientific quality (presentation of uptodate information)	No difference	No difference
Selection of speakers	Distance matters	Distance is not important
Presentations	More effective because of direct interaction	Less effective
Compatibility with daily tasks and daily life	Disconnected from job related responsibilities although this could be distractive.	Being able to carry daily professional tasks

Ethical Approval: N.A.

Informed Consent: N.A.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed

Author Contributions: Ö.E., R.Ü., A.A., S.Ş.Y.; Design – Ö.E., R.Ü., A.A., S.Ş.Y.; Supervision – Ö.E., R.Ü., A.A., S.Ş.Y.; Materials – R.Ü.; Data Collection and/or Processing – Ö.E.; Analysis and/or

Interpretation – Ö.E., R.Ü., A.A., S.Ş.Y.; Literature Review – R.Ü.; Writer – Ö.E.; Critical Reviews – Ö.E., R.Ü., A.A., S.Ş.Y.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Financial Disclosure: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

REFERENCES

- 1 Yusuf E, Ong DS, Martin-Quiros A, Skevaki C, Cortez J, Dedić K, et al. A large survey among European trainees in clinical microbiology and infectious disease on training systems and training adequacy: identifying the gaps and suggesting improvements. *Eur J Clin Microbiol Infect Dis.* 2017;36(2):233-42. [[CrossRef](#)]
- 2 Sayner AA, Ergönül E. E-learning in clinical microbiology and infectious diseases. *Clin Microbiol Infect.* 2021;27(11):1589-94. [[CrossRef](#)]
- 3 Stamelou M, Struhal W, Ten Cate O, Matczak M, Çalışkan SA, Soffietti R, et al. Evaluation of the 2020 European Academy of Neurology virtual congress: transition from a face-to-face to a virtual meeting. *Eur J Neurol.* 2021;28(8):2523-32. [[CrossRef](#)]