

Focus Group 3 Transcript: 3 students

Interviewer

The course consisted of the e-learning section and then the face-to-face follow-up tutorials which built on the same topics, what overall did you think of the course?

Student

I thought the e-learning was good. [course lead] mentioned that before Easter there were a lot of lectures and then the e-learning simplified it all which was good. But then I was just a bit surprised that we then got the lectures after that. I don't know if you guys felt the same? We had the e-learning and then remember he went through it all again

Student

Yeah, it seemed like he was just doing the same thing, but twice.

Student

I mean it was good to like help us learn. If we had just had the lectures I might have thought this is way over my head, this is too much in one go but I just thought that after the e-learning 'cause I thought that explained it quite well, that it was maybe a bit too much of the same thing.. I don't know

Student

Maybe the lectures could differ slightly but I liked the fact that we had the e-learning first because it did... then covered it again, it did cement it in my mind, because usually I walk into one of those and I have absolutely no idea what is going on. And I don't ask questions because I just don't know anything to ask, you know. But having the e-learning module even if you don't get it the first time round the e-learning module, you can kind of ... it does sort of give your mind some trigger words .. to recognise

Student

That's true.

Student

Yeah I think it would be quite good to have them before the course starts

Student

Definitely

Student

So like two weeks before, these are the basic background core essential things that you should know, and had I known especially the stuff that we covered in this module 3 even at the start of the year, it would have made stuff in other modules a lot easier. And had there been the same sort of things for other modules, I reckon it would have made the lectures make a lot sense. So often you turn up for a lecture and they just jump in so far beyond your knowledge that it all just goes over your head for an hour and you can't ask effective questions because you don't know the fundamentals to start with.

Student

It's difficult because you ... a lot of the lecturers are kind of, they don't know necessarily what is always what's been covered

Student

Yeah that's true

Student

They have no idea of prior knowledge

Student

I think that ... definitely it's great to have some of these before and also during the course as well. I think what would be really good especially just for the neuro module, would be to have a little bit just of background on everything, like the anatomy as well of the brain 'cause we integrate with the neuroscience BSc for that one, a lot of the lectures I found that they probably knew what they were talking about when they were talking about the interior what-me-call-it and I haven't done any of that stuff since like first year...

Student

But remember, the other thing that I found surprising was like when you spoke to the neuro students themselves, they were like these lectures are so much harder because you guys are here. They thought the lectures were... We thought it was hard the neuro stuff cause we were with neuro, they thought it was hard because they were with us, so they probably tried to combine two aspects of neurology and pharmacology, and maybe it was a bit like too disjointed. I don't know..

Student

Yeah and I think maybe what could solve that would having these kind of the basic stuff right at the beginning in these e-modules, maybe one sess for the basic, kind of, anatomy

Student

Yeah background knowledge

Student

A bit of background and then having a more detailed one halfway through which has some more quizzes and tests

Student

Almost I think for the second module cardio and resp pharmacology, I would imagine if you were to sort of develop one for the second years in their cardio and resp pharmacology, I would have genuinely used that at the start of the cardio/resp module to kind of bring myself back up to scratch again. 'Cause when you do clinical medicine you don't really think of stuff in terms of all the different receptors the drugs acting on x,y and z and the sort of basis science behind the drugs but more the clinical aspect of like using them. And so across the third year, that's sort of knowledge that you had in second year can wane a bit and then you suddenly start back into your pharmacology BSc in 4th year and you're sort of dredging out really sketchy knowledge. Almost if you were to develop one for the second years, I reckon, and then put it at the start of our cardio/resp module, I would use it again

Student

That would be quite a good idea, I think that's a good idea

Interviewer

Ok that's really helpful. What do you think about the balance – we've covered this a bit – what do you think about the balance between what you learnt in the e-learning section and what you learnt in the tutorials which followed from that?

Student

I felt that the balance was quite good. Obviously there was some overlap but that's always good in my opinion to cement, you know, the knowledge. I found it really helpful. I think if we had had it a bit earlier again, I think it would have been a little bit ... but we've discussed that. I kind of felt that in particular the kind of genetic components, that was really helpful to learn from the e-learning modules because we obviously cover them a little bit in the lectures and tutorials, but actually it had a really nice way of breaking it down in the e-learning module and covered it in greater detail I think there. And then it was just moving forward we had knowledge that made everything else make sense, and also made everything you know ... for example, the Alzheimer's treatments, it kind of made that make more sense because we knew the genetics and the process behind it. We knew the theory of why they were using some of these drugs in clinical trials.

Student

I think for me the receptor one was probably the most useful e-module, just because I can just imagine if we had just had the lecture on its own, it would have been like 'oh man', 'cause it's just like memorising it, there's not really a way to understand it. You just have to memorise what receptor is bound to which one. So if we had just had a lecture on it, you would have just thought I've just got to go home and learn it all. Because we had already been exposed to it before in the e-module, when we went over it again, it was much easier I think to understand.

Student

I think the e-module is really well is especially those neuro pharm in terms of the literature in the field, it's all a bit contradictory, a bit of a mess sometimes and trying to work that out for yourself and what you need to know can be a real challenge. But if someone else has done the hard work for us, taking it all out, put it into clear easy to assimilate format which then made when we went to the lectures, I almost sort of had a framework to put stuff on to.

Student

That's right

Student

... Whereas if I had just gone straight to the lecture, it would have just been a massive ... too many receptors, not knowing really how they interlink, not knowing what categories they fall into, I think the way it kind of broke it down into a structure was very good.

Interviewer

Great, and do you think the content that was covered just in the e-learning section, was that at an appropriate level?

Student

I think so

Student

I think it's quite well pitched

Student

Yeah

Student

I think they spoke a bit slowly, that's just what it is isn't it?

Interviewer

And what did you think about the face-to-face tutorials?

Student

That was good as always I think. Those tutorials are really helpful because everyone just gets involved in asking questions all the time so it helps...

Student

It would be better if they weren't given on a three hour block on a Friday afternoon but there's nothing you can do about that!

[Laughing]

Student

How long after the e-learning module was the tutorial?

Student

About a week

Student

Was it a week? Ok

Interviewer

And again did you think that the content that you got at the face-to-face tutorial, was at an appropriate level and why?

Student

What's good with the face-to-face tutorial is that you get because its interactive you can, you know, if the content doesn't make sense, it's much easier to ask you know... and maybe have it adjusted then and there

Student

There were some good study examples and stuff.... That was helpful.

Interviewer

Ok and we have talked about it generally ... this combination of e-learning and then a face-to-face tutorial is actually something called blended learning, so we have talked about it generally in terms of this module, what do you think about using this approach in other parts of your medical curriculum?

Student

I think it's a really good idea

Student

I think it's fantastic

Student

I think it's a much better than the current system.

Student

The only thing is that I think it sort of doubles the time for everything so you can't do it for kind of everything. Do you think? I don't know.

Student

But at the same time, if I knew what was kind of going on before I went to things, I would just learn so much more.

Student

But then obviously the e-modules force you to do it, cause everyone is like I should read beforehand but no one does it. You are hardly going to whip out your grey's anatomy and read 100 pages before the next session... No one genuinely has the time to do that whereas e-modules kind of give you that basic grounding that actually makes stuff make sense.

Student

I think that 'cause we had in 3rd year, we had... 'cause obviously I think would have been really useful for 1st and 2nd year when we do our the lecture based part of the course .. But also in 3rd year i remember we had some e-learning kind of ... a component and they had quizzes at the end of it, and some of them were quite well done but some of them were a bit ...

Student

A bit disjointed weren't they?

Student

And really didn't kind of make sense and I think if they were a set of well designed 'cause you know... there were loads ...

Student

... that focused on a few

Student

Exactly a few really well done that would cover like maybe like renal disease, and the basics of that, and basics of management of some of the conditions and diagnoses. You know break it down into chunks like that, rather than trying to do everything making it disjointed.

Student

'Cause there's a lot that you learn, that you're meant to learn on the go, but there would be some basics that would be really helpful to go into with

Student

But even those in 3rd year, not everyone did all of them

Student

No, no they didn't

Student

But if people made them better I think people would see that they are a bit more worthwhile

Student

They are quite good. It's kind of almost like for those 3rd year ones, it's like it's coming, it's getting good but it's not quite there yet.

Student

But if it was the quality...

Student

A lot they haven't been updated since like 2005

Student

Yeah... but if it's the quality we had with the neuro one, I think it would encourage a lot more people in to doing it.

Student

I think the other ones were just like e-lectures but this is like an e-module, it's like more animated, the other ones was just like slides, weren't they?

Student

Yeah

Student

Exactly

Student

I would imagine the comparative cost of making an animated one compared to....

Student

Yeah I'm sure it's huge but ...

Student

... compared to just a lecture or a talk and recording it is just ... quite substantial.

Interviewer

Anything else?

Student

IPads are good.

Interviewer

You have talked about this a little bit but are there any specific parts of your course that you could think of which this approach could be applied to, and you've mentioned some of the 3rd year lectures, but is there anything else that immediately pops up?

Student

Well we've sort of said every year...

Student

Yeah [laughter] every year, as much as possible really... even looking forward to next year, I would imagine if you got like a set of e-modules before you went and did paediatrics or a set of e-modules before you did obs and gynae, I reckon it would be massively helpful. You turn up on these specialist placements and if someone expects you to learn how to do a cervical smear and know what you are looking for ...

Student

I think it would be genuinely... I think if you gave an e-module before each of the major placements saying like these are the main ... like just outline the main conditions 'cause you can read up before you go in but it's difficult to hone your, focus your reading, but if someone ... I know it sounds lazy, but if someone has done it for you, it makes people more likely to do it, and it also means that you come in not sort of feeling like you are completely useless when someone asks you... like in 3rd year when you kind of ... yeah ... in 3rd year you come in and you kind of know absolutely nothing.

Student

But at least with 3rd year, you have already been taught about the cardiovascular system but we've been taught nothing really about ...

Student

Obs and gynae or whatever

Student

Even more intensive to do it...

Student

I think what I'm saying as well is Imperial wants you to pick up as much information as possible in a short of time as possible so we can come out as sort of an excellent all-rounded student but if they kind of gave the material to you in a polished easy to access format rather than expecting you to go away and sift through everything, it would save you a massive amount of time, and you could learn so much more in the time you've got if it's in a good to access format.

Student

And also it helps you kind of focus your learning later on as well, it gives you a base, that's the point, it gives you a base on which you can build rather than having to kind of build that base from scratch for yourself. You know you can go straight into learning more detailed ...

Student

Yeah, I think that's a good idea for 5th year specialties at least.

Interviewer

Is there anything you would like to say about this learning experience?

Student

I think generally I enjoy the pharmacology the way it was set out. Even stuff that we didn't have e-lectures in module 1 and module 2, the lectures that we got were well done and well-pitched at the level that we needed to know so it was good in that sense.

Student

Come to think of it, just to ... one last thought is that some of the ... so in module 1, going into some of the more maths-y bits and even some of the genetics kind of bits ... cause again we hadn't done it for a while, having that would have been great to have a summary kind of e-module, cause in my mind everything was quite cluttered....

Student

I think module 1 didn't follow on from ...

Student

I think module 1 just seemed really disjointed and lots of people who were very expert in their field coming to talk to people who had no idea about what on earth they did, weren't very good at explaining it, and it wasn't really linked to the rest of course so those stand out lectures where everyone just sat there and went I genuinely have no idea what you are talking about, and even after revising it, I like rote learned some key points that I could possibly write in the event of an emergency in the exams...

Student

Yeah...

Student

But the actual understanding of the material was probably quite poor. Whereas module 2, and module 3, it just all kind of made sense

Student

Which is a shame, because some of the... when I was revising, some of the stuff actually started to make sense and it was really, really interesting, and I think it would have been really great to know in greater detail, but at that point, I was like I would love to read more into this but I have no time because I've got an exam in 3 days so...

Student

It kind of vaguely started to make sense about 48 hours before ...

Student

But if we had some background stuff, maybe if they could find out, you know, what sort of basics we should know before going into some of these.. you know genetics stuff, you know, cause when people talking about these types... like the chimaeras and the crosses, we haven't done that, probably ever actually

Student

I think the stuff like the anaesthetics stuff was ...

Student

Yeah... that's all fine. We kind of came across that, all the receptors, we'd done before. It makes sense, you see those drugs, but it's more the sort of novel like pharmaceutical methods, or pharmaceutical development tools that are ultimately really specialist areas of science and they were giving us papers from niche journals that had come out in like 2014 from someone who has a degree in computer science modelling, x y and z...

Student

Homology modelling

Student

...Like homology modelling of all the different compounds in rat urine, like... like it needs to be put in a better context.

Student

I mean basically we don't like animals, we don't like pre-clinical

Student

It's not preclinical, it's just it would be alright if it was pitched at an understandable level and was actually explained properly

Student

I think the way it was pitched would have been fine if we had had an introductory kind of thing that just led us into it a bit. That's my point, because I really liked that, I actually really liked the lectures having gone through them in a bit more detail, some of them were really interesting. The one about the fly actually, you know, it's just really clever genetics so it was really interesting but again because I don't think we had ever done anything like that, it was difficult but again just having that kind of introductory... so maybe the introductory 2 weeks could have maybe something to prepare ...

Student

Yeah cause that introductory 2 week kind of went over stuff that we already knew like receptors and whatever, but maybe that's a good idea.

Student

I reckon having e-modules in that first introductory week would be really good

Student

Yeah.