

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Physicians: A Survey-Based Analysis

Abigail Kurian,^{1,3} Dr. Shaequa Dasnadi MBBS, M.D.,² Cristina Martin MSN, RN, NEA-BC, RNC-OB²
¹Ridge Point High School, Missouri City, TX
²Childbirth Center, Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital, Sugar Land, TX
³Gifted and Talented Mentorship Program, Fort Bend ISD, TX

Introduction

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, stress levels and the day to day lives of individuals throughout the world have been greatly impacted. Moreover, the lives of those dealing with the pandemic in the hospital and healthcare setting have dramatically changed in the past two years. Medical professions have the reputation of being challenging and stressful. A study conducted by Amanullah & Shankar concludes that due to the exasperation of these factors during the pandemic, burnout is an increasingly prominent issue amongst physicians. It asserts that not only are the physicians impacted by this, but it reaches a wider scale by affecting patient care, families, and society (1). Due to this concern, it is crucial that we gain an understanding on the impact the pandemic has had on medical professionals. Papers have studied the impact of COVID-19 on physician burnout, but it is also essential to investigate how the pandemic has impacted the overall well being of physicians in addition to their continuing medical education (CME) opportunities. Connections through my mentorship made it more plausible to receive survey responses from physicians. Therefore, I conducted this study in order to gain a better understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the work/life balance and the continuation of medical education for physicians.

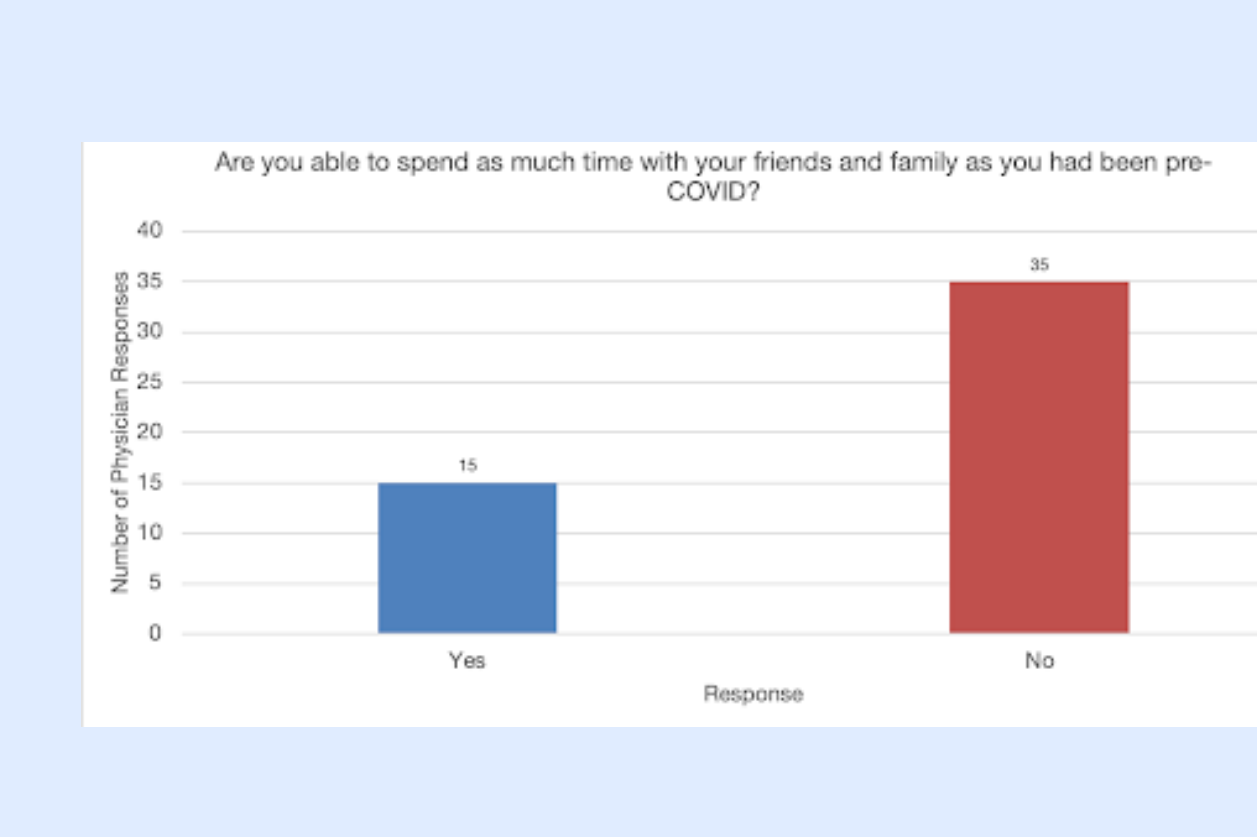
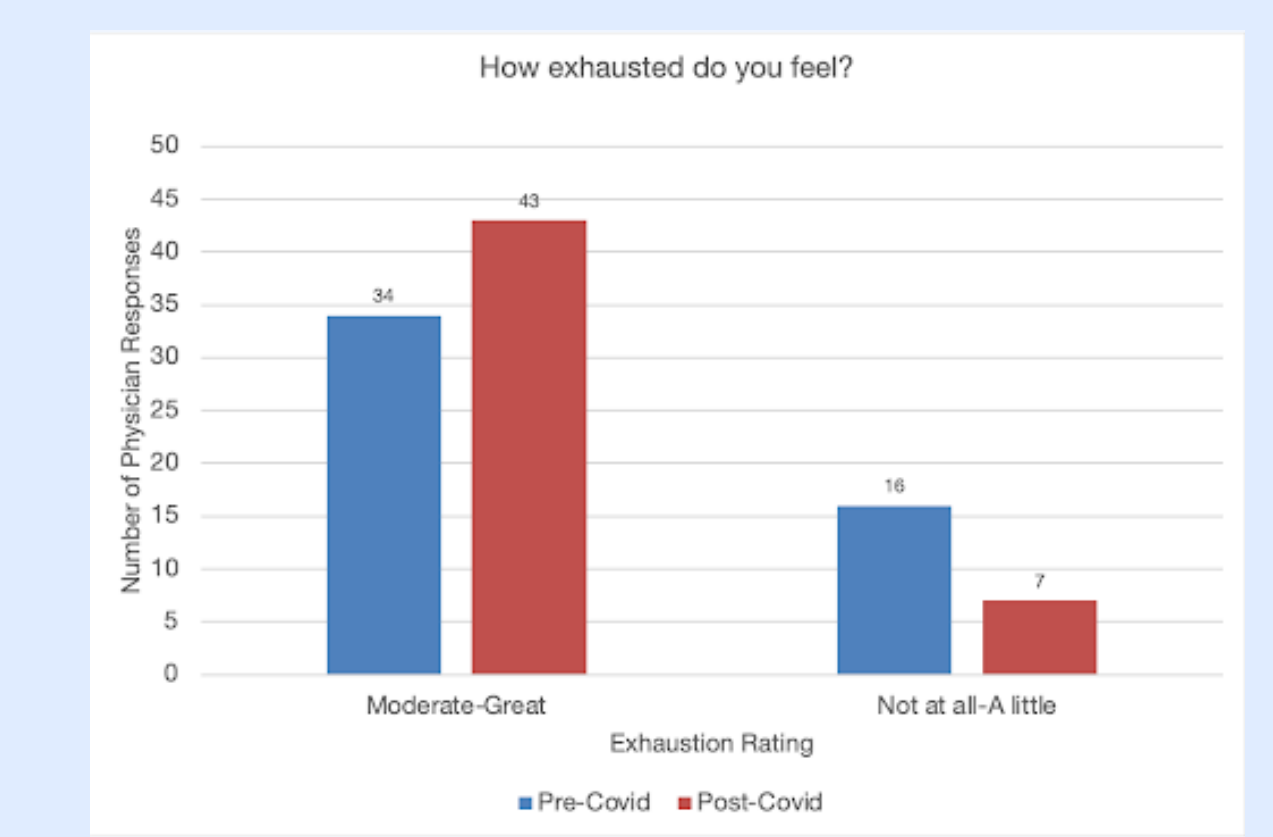
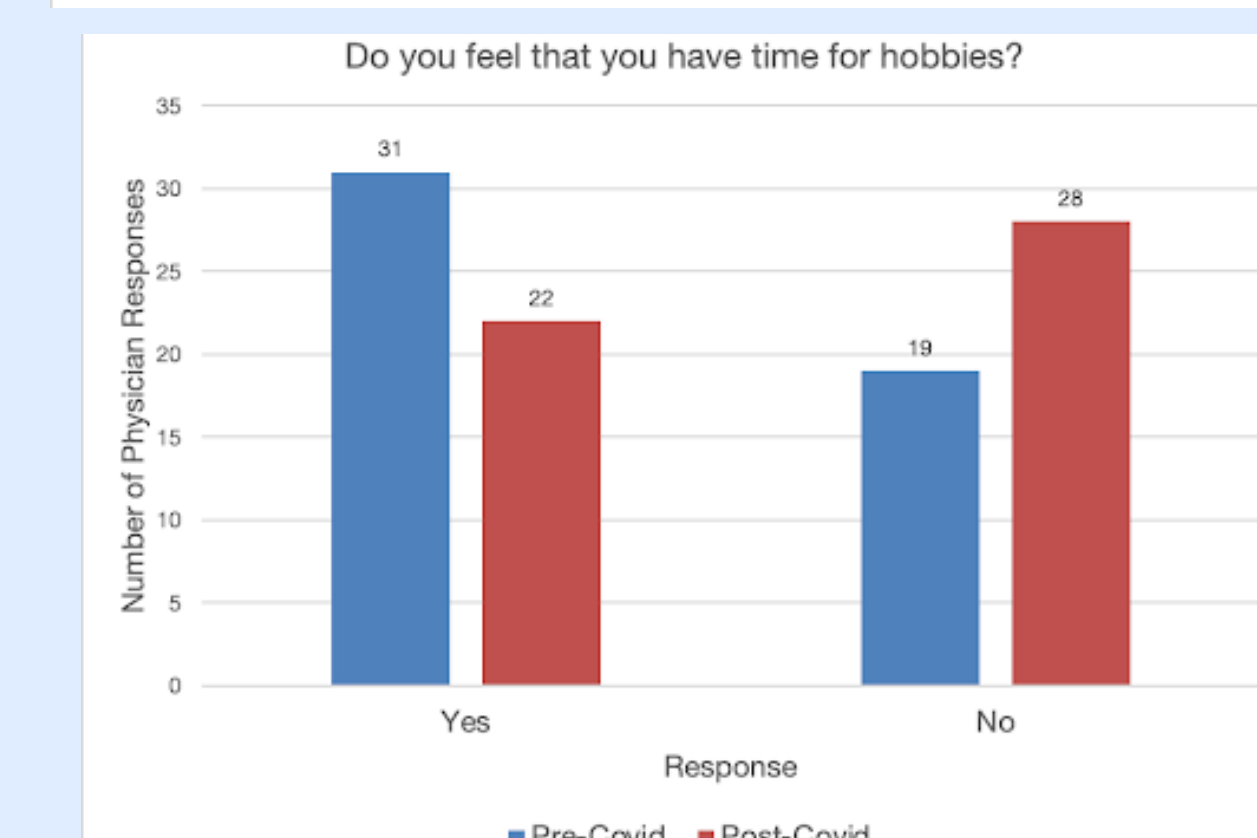
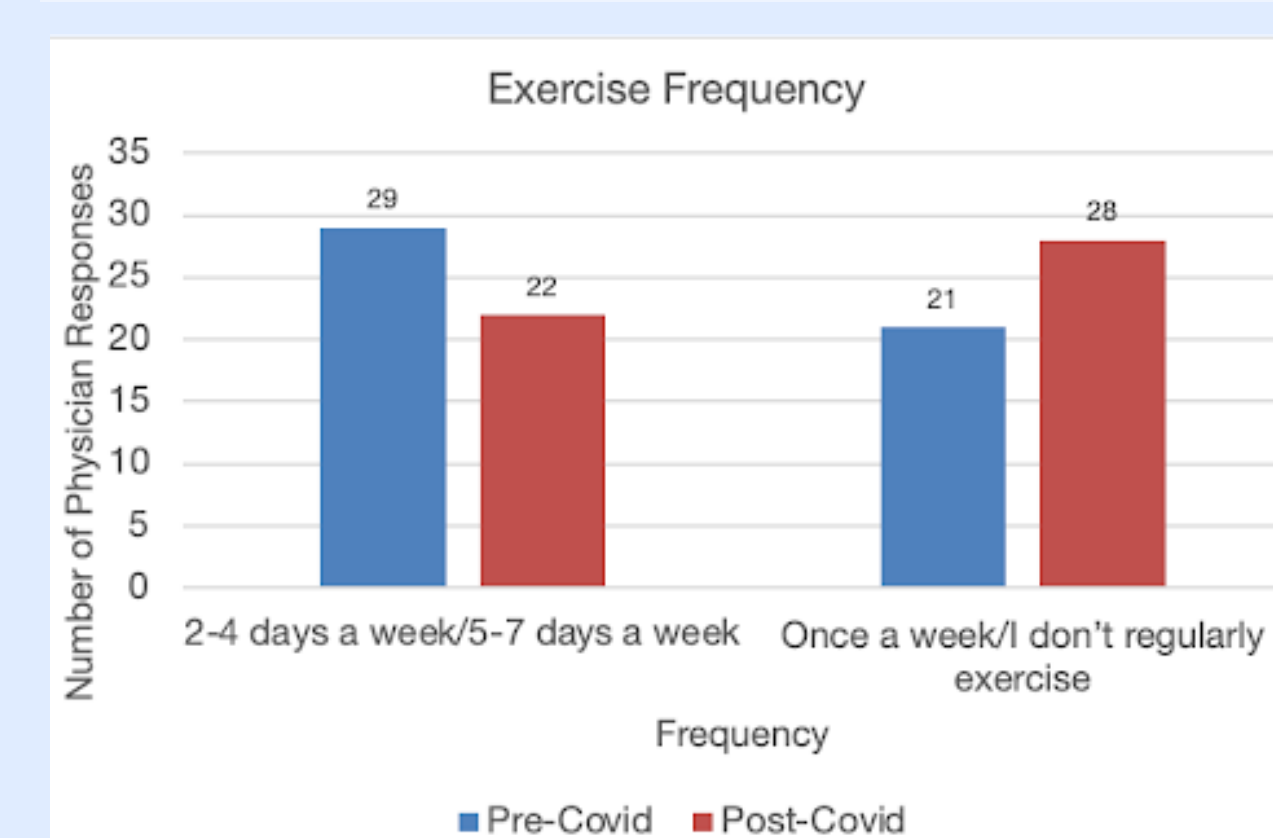
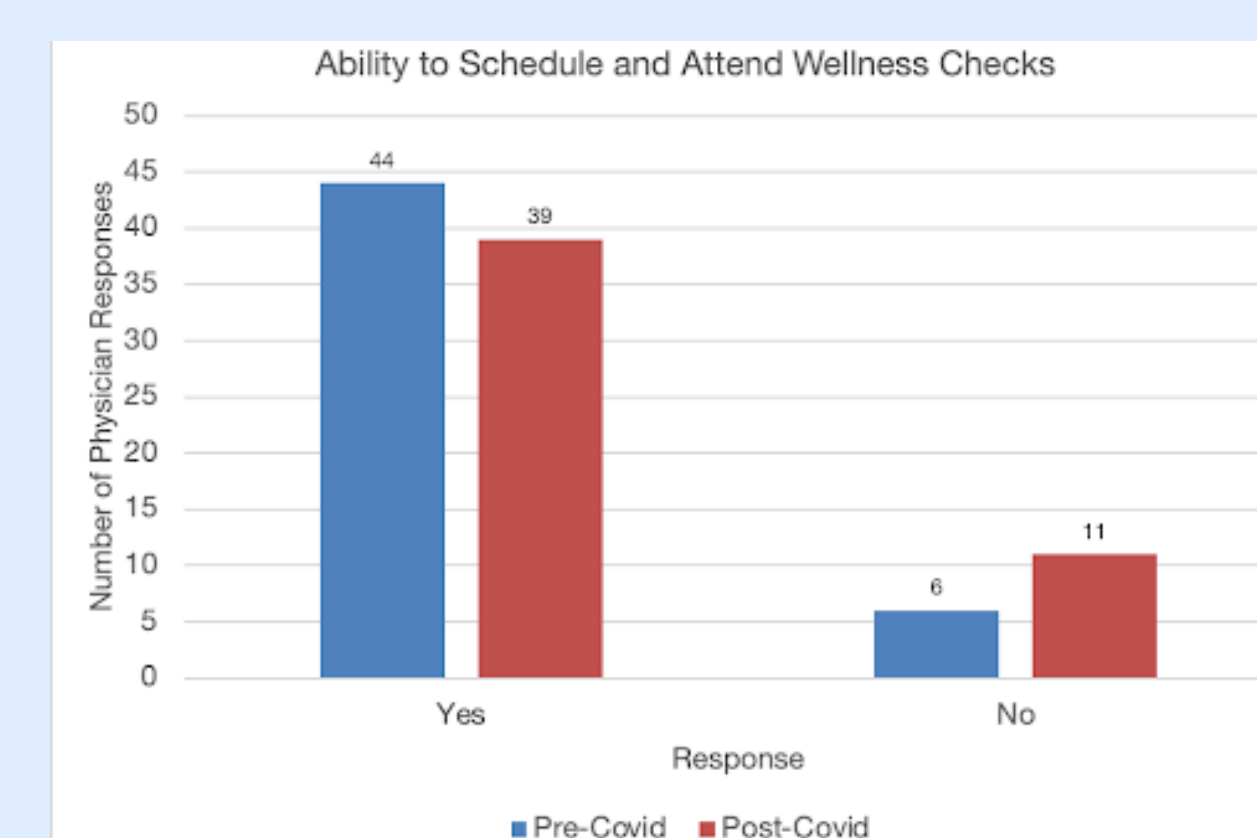
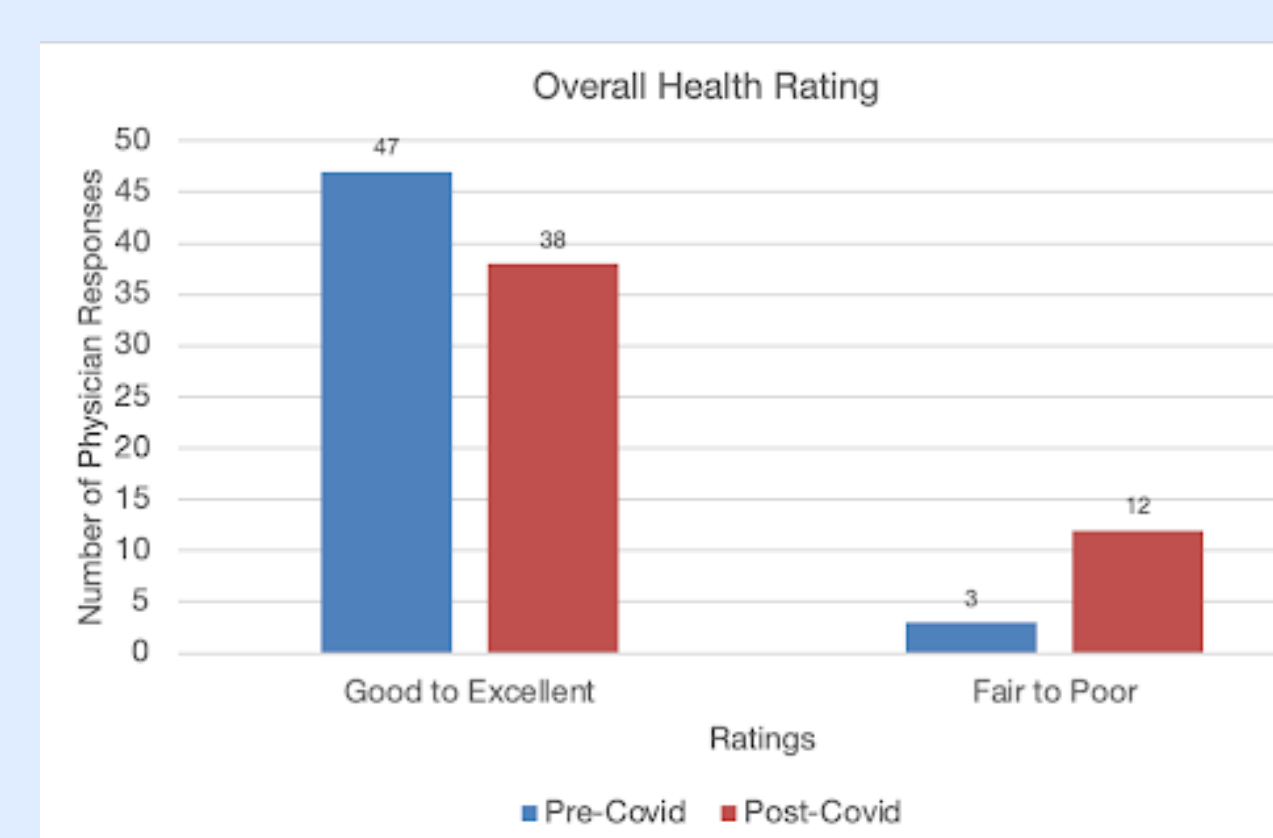
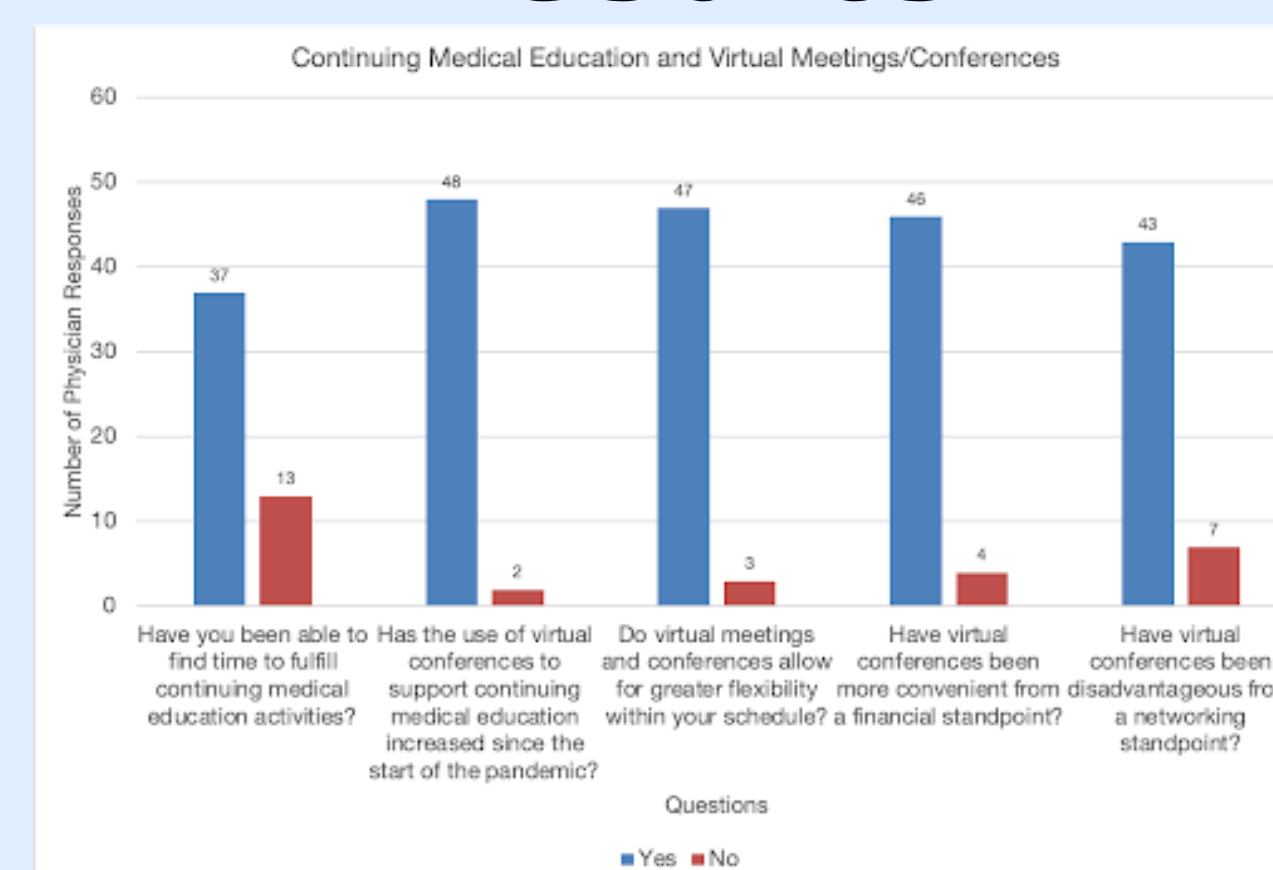
Methodology

- This research process holds an exploratory aim, examining the work life balance and continuation of medical education of physicians across the nation, pre and post COVID-19.
- Pre and post COVID-19 questions regarding overall health, ability to schedule and attend wellness checks, time for family/friends, exercise frequency, time for hobbies, exhaustion, and experience with virtual methods of continuing medical education were created in pairing with scales of rating/answer options, or a yes or no answer choice. The first section focused on the work/life balance and well-being of the physicians while the second half targeted virtual conferences, meetings, and education.
- The survey was posted on two different physician forums- Academic Physician Moms Group (National) and the Greater Houston Area South Asian Women Physicians Group.
- It received a total of fifty responses. This data was used to create graphs that presented the data of corresponding pre and post COVID questions so that the results would be easily comparable. Comparisons formed by the analysis of these graphs will be used to better understand changes in physicians' work/life balance and continuation of medical education, if any, since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals around the world, but it directly affects some professionals on a daily basis. The unfortunate reality of the impact of this pandemic on those in the medical field is that varying modes of work, increased workloads, and overall heightened stress have become factors contributing to changes in personal well-being and the ability to pursue further knowledge and education through continuing medical education (CME) activities. This research endeavor includes self-reported data regarding the work/life balance qualities and CME opportunities prior to and after the start of the pandemic for physicians, in order to highlight their state of overall well-being and educational ability as a result of COVID-19. The investigation consisted of a survey of pre and post COVID questions regarding work/life balance and general questions about the current state of CME activities, sent out to physicians on a national scale. The data revealed that there has been a noticeable disruption to work/life balance for physicians upon the pandemic. This new understanding leads to the conclusion that changes and strategies must be implemented in order to regulate the work/life balance of physicians. It also suggested that CME has experienced quite an evolution as well in that it has become generally accessible and convenient for physicians. This information can be utilized to maximize the future accessibility and impact of CME activities for physicians.

Results



Findings

The results of the study reveal that with an *n* of 50, post-Covid there was an 18% increase in those who rated their overall health as fair to poor, a 10% increase of those who were unable to schedule or attend wellness checks, 14% increase of exercising once a week or irregularly, 18% increase of not having enough time for hobbies, and an 18% increase in moderate to great exhaustion. 70% of physicians who participated in the survey reported that they are not able to spend as much time with friends and family as they had been able to pre-Covid. These statistics suggest an overall decrease in physician well-being, as an increase in the inability to meet markers of satisfactory health were reported. 78% of physicians reported that they have been able to fulfill CME activities during the pandemic, 96% conveyed an increase in the use of virtual methods to support CME, 94% expressed that virtual meetings and conferences allowed for greater flexibility within their schedule, 92% described virtual conferences as more financially convenient, and 86% relayed the inconvenience of virtual conferences from a networking standpoint. These statistics emphasize that virtual modalities for CME, since the start of the pandemic, have been mostly beneficial for physicians with the exception of having limited networking opportunities.

Discussion

The findings of the study were caused by many factors brought about by the pandemic. Results communicated an increase in poor to fair health ratings and exhaustion, inability to schedule and attend wellness checks, inadequate time for hobbies, decreased exercise frequency, and less time to spend with friends and family post-Covid. These results were likely due to the combination of increased workload, stress, lack of time to focus on personal needs due to high demands at work, limited appointment availability, demanding schedules, and caution over Covid exposure. A study by Kelly et. al, found that institutions that provide resources to promote mental and emotional well-being had fewer reports of physician burnout. Institutional peer support programs, mentor programs, and initiatives taken by program directors are viable options for stabilizing the lack of work/life balance and heightened stress. The consensus that there has been an increase in virtual modalities for CME activities, greater schedule flexibility, and financial convenience was likely caused by remote meetings and conferences due to health concerns, the ability to participate from convenient locations outside of the workplace, and lack of transportation and accommodations needed to attend. However, they were primarily disadvantageous from a networking standpoint, likely due to a sense of impersonalness conveyed through virtual modalities. Overall, most physicians reported that they have been able to successfully fulfill CME activities during the pandemic, which was likely due to the flexibility and financial convenience provided by virtual education methods. This suggests that virtual CME modalities should be continued post-pandemic, but networking programs and events may need to be created in order to overcome the virtual barricade caused by Covid. Limitations of the study include a primarily female participant group, unknown specialties of the physicians, and the unknown status of the physicians' state of at home support.

References

- (1) Amanullah, S., & Ramesh Shankar, R. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Physician Burnout Globally: A Review. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 8(4), 421. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare8040421>
- (2) Kelly, M., Soles, R., Garcia, E., & Kundu, I. (2020). Job Stress, Burnout, Work-Life Balance, Well-Being, and Job Satisfaction Among Pathology Residents and Fellows. *American journal of clinical pathology*, 153(4), 449–469. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcp/aqaa013>