Scholarly productivity of US medical schools before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

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PURPOSE

- The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted scientific research but was accompanied by a rapid increase in research focused on this new disease.
- We aimed to study how the academic productivity of US medical schools changed during the pandemic and what school characteristics were associated with trends in scholarly publication.

METHODS

- Annual totals of publications for each US MD-granting medical school were extracted for 2019-2021 from the Scopus database.
- Schools were categorized as:
  - Experiencing a sustained increase in publications
  - Transient increase in publications
  - No increase in publications.
- Bivariate tests compared school characteristics among the three (3) categories

RESULTS

- Out of 139 MD schools:
  - 79% experienced sustained growth in publications
  - 6% experienced transient growth
  - 14% experienced no growth.
- Sustained growth was associated with being affiliated with an R1 university, having a larger faculty size, the presence of an EM residency, having higher NIH funding, and experiencing higher COVID-19 infection rates in the local community.
- Among predominantly White institutions, a higher diversity of women faculty was associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing transient growth in publications.

CONCLUSIONS

- Scientific output increased during the pandemic at most medical schools.
- We identified structural factors related to research capacity, faculty diversity, and the impact of the pandemic that may have contributed to differing trends in scholarly productivity among medical schools.
- Further attention is needed to enhance equity in research opportunities, considering diverging trends in productivity between more and less advantaged schools.