

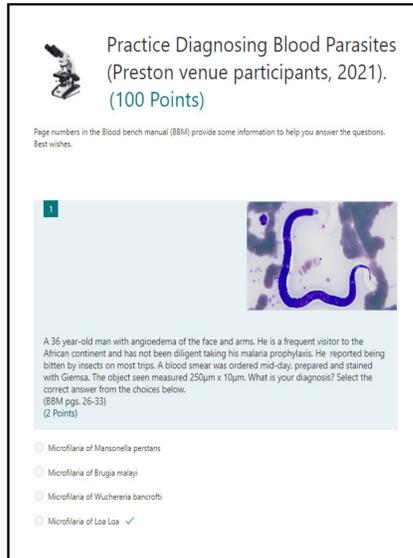
An innovative approach to teaching parasite microscopy on-line

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INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

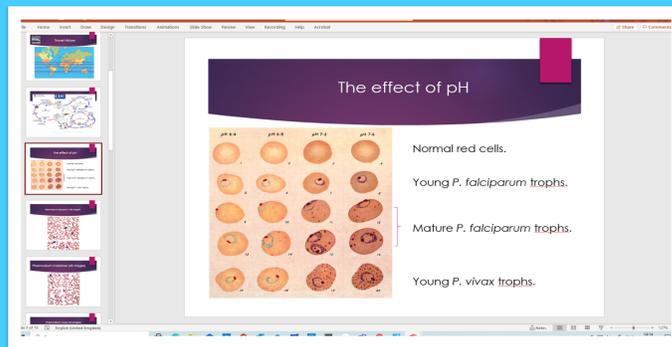
COVID19 compelled UK NEQAS Parasitology to rethink the delivery of its face-to-face parasite microscopy courses. The challenge was to adapt traditional blood and faecal laboratory sessions to an on-line environment and cater for an influx of new entrants to the discipline.



The UK NEQAS Parasitology Teaching Programme organises regional courses in different geographical areas throughout the UK and Ireland. The regional venues currently used are: Birmingham, Cardiff, Dublin, Dundee, Exeter, London, Preston and Newcastle.

METHODS

The on-line teaching is divided into three one-hour parts. The first is a PowerPoint presentation on how to go about identifying parasites microscopically. In the second hour, the students practice the techniques taught in the first hour with the aid of a bench manual and digital images compiled in Microsoft Forms. They are encouraged to have discussions among themselves where it is convenient to do so. The last hour is devoted to reviewing the exercise.



RESULTS

An end of course evaluation of seventy-six faecal course participants showed an average score of 9.45 out of 10 to recommend the event to others. Seventy seven out of 77 thought the learning activities used were effective. In a blood parasite course evaluation, 79 respondents, with an average evaluation score of 8.76 out of 10, said they were likely to recommend the event to others whilst 78 out of 79 thought the learning activities used were effective. Asked if there was a need for a separate entry-level course, 51.4% said yes and 48.6% said no from the faecal course and from the blood course, 48.9% said yes and 51.1% said no.

UK NEQAS Parasitology won an RCPATH Excellence Award in 2019 for Excellence in Education. Subsequently, testimonials have been received praising the excellent delivery of learning by UK NEQAS Parasitology. Two examples are given below:

1. "Firstly, I'd like to thank you for doing the course virtually. The staff attending have come back from the education centre "buzzing"!!! The feedback I received from them was really positive and they've really enjoyed it. They especially enjoyed the quiz, their answers being a team effort but they all felt this helped tremendously and they learned a lot" (19 January 2021)

2. "Very thorough and well structured. I've learnt a lot more from this version of the course than from previous ones I attended in Preston. These training sessions and the NEQAS distributions are very valuable to staff in my lab as we only get positive patient malaria samples every 5 years or so! Thank you. (8/9/2021)

CONCLUSION

- UK NEQAS for Parasitology has a robust approach to tackling poor performance and maintaining a high standard of diagnostic parasitology. On-line learning is more accessible and convenient for acquiring knowledge.
- On-line learning platforms reach more people than face-to-face sessions.
- On-line learning complements face-to-face teaching of parasite microscopy but is not a replacement for it.
- Provision of on-line teaching has allowed many more people to access the course, including those with little experience in parasitology. This affects the depth of teaching provided, as an attempt is made to cater for the different grades of attendees. However, with participants' views on the need for a separate entry level course not being decisive either way, further work on the curriculum is being considered to offer mixed level classes using the on-line sessions to complement the face-to-face sessions. This is an innovative approach to teaching parasite microscopy. A blended mode of teaching and learning born out of the COVID19 lockdown restrictions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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