

Dr Julie Chen  
Associate Professor (Teaching)  
Assistant Dean (Learner Wellbeing)  
Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care &  
Bau Institute of Medical and Health Sciences Education, LKS Faculty of Medicine  
The University of Hong Kong

Dr Pauline Luk  
Lecturer (Project Manager)  
Bau Institute of Medical and Health Sciences Education, LKS Faculty of Medicine  
The University of Hong Kong

***connect\*ed*: The evolution of a virtual community of learning on a social media platform**

Abstract:

Beginning in 2018-19, the entire third-year class of medical students at the LKS Faculty of Medicine embarked on a mandatory, credit-bearing Enrichment Year with a focus of their own choosing. The range of learning experiences and geographic distance posed a challenge for students to remain in academic contact and to access social support. 38 small groups comprised of one faculty mentor + six students formed ***connect\*ed***, a virtual community of learning. The aim was to link diverse student experiences with the common goal of being a doctor through structured learning activities and to offer an avenue for mutual support. A proprietary social media application was adapted as the learning and communication e-platform. Students achieved the desired learning outcomes but structured online learning on a social media platform was a challenge. ***connect\*ed*** was more effective and better received as a network for informal sharing and social support. Mentors were a crucial link in the support network that became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. ***connect\*ed*** can take advantage of the strengths of virtual communities of learning and re-focus on supporting non-academic learning needs while providing social support.

[***connect\*ed*** website: <https://connected.hku.hk/> ]