

# Executive Summary

*Transitioning to Virtual Academic  
Detailing amid COVID-19:  
A Case Study*



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# Executive Summary

## Background

Starting in 2020, COVID-19 public health protocols required that medical educators rapidly move the bulk of their curriculum online. This includes Academic Detailing (AD) programming, a form of interprofessional, evidence-based educational outreach for practicing health care providers.

AD is facilitated predominantly by specially trained pharmacists who target physician prescribing practices, to ensure that physicians are supported in keeping abreast of rapidly changing best practices related to prescribing. This service is important for ensuring safe, effective, and cost-effective medical care.

In Nova Scotia, AD is designed and delivered by the Dalhousie Academic Detailing Service (ADS) in the Department of Continuing Professional Development and Medical Education in the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this exploratory case study of the Dalhousie ADS is to contribute to the sparse evidence base exploring virtual AD, and its components, toward identifying best practices.

## Research Questions

1. What are the challenges and opportunities afforded by a transition from in-person to virtual Academic Detailing in Nova Scotia?
2. What are best practices for a transition to virtual Academic Detailing amid COVID-19?

## Methods

This exploratory case study allowed for in-depth exploration of virtual AD as a contemporary phenomenon in a specific, bounded context. For this study, this bounded context is the Dalhousie Academic Detailing Service and its transition to virtual delivery amid COVID-19.

We used three methods: 1. Observation of one-to-one ADS sessions with an academic detailer and primary care provider (n=5 sessions); 2. One focus group with academic detailers (n= 6 participants); and interviews with primary care providers (n=6) and Academic Detailers (n=2) who participate in academic detailing with the Dalhousie ADS, and 3. Document analysis of curriculum and policy documents related to the ADS (n= 10).

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## Results

Our analysis identified several **strengths** brought by virtual detailing:

1. Inherent benefits of virtual programming;
  - Convenience
  - Accessibility
  - Exposure to virtual learning technologies
  - Environmental benefits
  - More content-focused delivery
  - Virtual archiving of detailing sessions.
2. Pre-existing strengths and skillsets in program leadership;
3. Global move toward virtual communication and telehealth amid COVID;
4. Pre-existing detailing relationships between detailers and participating physicians; and
5. Pre-existing roles and attributes of pharmacists as a profession.

Several **challenges** were also identified:

1. Issues with virtual presence (group sessions);
2. Difficulties in establishing consistency across in-person and virtual sessions; and
3. Technological issues.

## Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges globally. Virtual delivery of academic detailing has posed unique challenges and opportunities for innovation.

Our study findings support offering a blended model moving forward. One that integrates previous concepts and elements of AD, leverages strengths and challenges of both virtual and in-person delivery, and considers logistics, efficiencies and participant preferences.