



Dental Education - Need for a Paradigm Shift

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"Whether or not it has fully dawned on society, the reality is that Gen Y will soon have to assume the responsibility for a world crafted by previous generations".

- Charlie Caruso

Dentistry, as a profession, is as much of an art as much it is a science. The dental curriculum is a guideline to gradually develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes with the aim of graduating a prospective dentist for safe and competent practice upon commencement of their internship. Unfortunately, we as a fraternity are failing to produce such competent dentists. The rising number of medico-legal cases against dentists is a proof of that. There is an urgent need for shift in structure of dental education in our country. Competency is related to clinical experience and clinical work; it does not come with theoretical knowledge alone. It is based on skills that one has acquired through practice and exposure to variety of cases under proper guidance and supervision.

Despite the high academic scores, new graduates fail to efficiently apply the principles in practice as what is learned in the classroom is not always reinforced in the clinics. Moreover, exposure to medical problems is clearly not enough to enable the students to confidently handle medically compromised patients in dental clinics. In order to gain confidence in clinical practice, graduates have to work as an "associate" during or after internship with dental practitioners to understand and acquire patient and practice management skills. No wonder, these insecurities have led to a sudden boom in number of continuing dental education programs in every nook and corner of the country making it into a business. People with very minimal experience have also started their own courses and training programs for which a fresh pass-out easily fall as a victim.

On one hand there is an upsurge of research based programs in dental curriculum in the form of projects for undergraduates and PhDs for faculty, it is but an irony that the main thesis project at post-graduate level still occupies very less weightage and is fulfilled just as a formality most of the time. While the Ph.D is soon becoming a compulsion for the staff for gaining increments and promotions, the contribution of research based curriculum at undergraduate level is miniscule

In order to enhance the quality of dental health care in our country there is a dire need to enhance the quality of dental education, keeping in mind the growing demands of today's times. Throughout the world there is an escalated interest towards incorporating competency based education (CBE) curriculum. CBE concentrates on the knowledge, skills and values that the student must possess at the time of graduation, so that he/she is ready for the next level, the learning experience that will enable the student to acquire these competencies and last but not the least the ways of assessment needed to establish that the student has attained these competencies.

Besides multi-modal learning including traditional didactic learning through lectures, workshops, seminars, clinical simulation and tutorials, the changing paradigms make it imperative that group-based tutorials such as Case-Based-Learning (CBL) or Problem-Based-Learning (PBL), in addition to any hospital facilitated educational activities for managing medical emergencies

and medically compromised patients, practice management skills and knowledge about medico-legal problems and procedures be imparted with equal weightage to ensure a better future for the aspiring dental graduates.

This shift may finally ensure that the graduating dentist possesses sound theoretical knowledge and understanding of the subject, together with an adequate clinical experience to be able to resolve clinical problems encountered independently or without assistance hence improving the dental health scenario of our society.

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