

Guest Editorial: Current scenario of dental education in India

I am extremely happy to state that Dental Education in India has made tremendous progress, and is heading towards advancement in every aspect bringing a revolutionary change in its present scope and sphere of Oral Health. Like other branches of medical education, dental education in India has also received amazing recognition and acclamation over the years. Thanks to the zeal and enthusiasm of the pioneers who have toiled hard for the betterment of this noble profession. The historic Dentist Act was passed by the Parliament, since then Dental Education has received accolades and approbation from all the corners. I take this opportunity to salute Dr. Rafuddin Ahmed, “the father of dentistry in India”. It is his dedication and hard work, we stand today as the oral health care providers. Today we are ranked to be Number One as far as growth of dental colleges is concerned, but the scenario is not pleasing. In spite of 292 dental colleges in the country, the oral health of our citizens does not measure up to the mark, especially among those living in the rural areas. This has resulted into serious imbalance and disparity between urban and rural population as well as rich and poor. Number of dental surgeons qualifying every year is just unbelievable. We are conferring graduation to nearly 22000 students every year and majority of them are interested in practicing in urban areas only, for securing better prospects and better income. It is a paradoxical situation, as in a country like India where we boast of overcoming the problems of poverty, illiteracy and having been labeled as the strongest economy in the world with excellent GDP growth, dental/oral health of Indians still remains neglected.

The prevalence of dental diseases i.e. dental caries, periodontal disease and oral cancer is increasing in Indian population with a parallel increase in the number of dental surgeons over the years. Isn't this counter productive? It is a pitiable scenario that the dental graduates joining the dental fraternity these days are not capable and competent to handle any emergency situation and clinical training is far from satisfaction. With a rapid change in technology in dentistry, the fresh dental graduates and young teachers are far from keeping pace with these changes.

The custodians of dental profession are striving hard to



implement value based curriculum of dental education by introducing innovative concepts and ideas to make the dental education realistic, practical and student friendly and to make dental graduates, better oral health care professionals. The aim of dental education is to produce dental surgeon capable of promoting oral health of the masses at large. The burning issue today is not insufficiency of manpower but uniformity and equitable distribution. The lopsided situation of 68.89% people of India residing in rural areas and 85% dental surgeons practicing in urban areas needs to be balanced. This paradoxical situation needs to be looked into immediately.

The quest for knowledge has taken man to uncharted domain of ages. In the modern set up, feeding the embodiment of research leads to new invention and discoveries that enrich the life of human being in different ways. The future dental graduates needs to be trained both in genuine dental research as well as an ideal dental clinical practice. Hence availability of the clinical material (patients) is of paramount importance. The dental faculty should also dwell into exploring ways and means of incorporating clinical training and amalgamation of dental education and research so that our young graduates can become self-sufficient, self reliant and confident in discharging their moral duties to the nation.

I plead and appeal to the State Governments to incorporate dental health planning in their agenda as a matter of prime concern and create infrastructure for dental clinics at Civil Hospitals, Primary Health Centres, Sub-centres as well as at referral Hospitals in rural areas, so as to provide oral health care to our rural population. It shall have two fold beneficial effects. Firstly, it will greatly enhance good oral health practices, create awareness, alienate pain and suffering from dental diseases and secondly it would provide job opportunities, to young dental professionals. At present after graduation the probability of employment is bleak, the alternate is quite dismayed and disheartening as number of dental graduates find it difficult to settle in dental practice and tug of war starts between the fellow professionals. The acquisition of lifelong learning skills, values and attitude should receive at least as much emphasis as the acquisition of knowledge.

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.contempclindent.org
	DOI: 10.4103/0976-237X.91786

In my opinion the important aspect is the training of trainers. The faculty should devote time to students and the institutes need to understand the importance of dedicated and full time faculty and thus encourage the deployment of full time teachers. This will instill a feeling of responsibility and accountability so that they dedicate themselves to the students, as well as to the profession and finally to the nation.

Innovation is the key of success and therefore boosting research culture among students is important. Invention and creativity are the basic elements of fundamental research. This is essentially required to be pursued by the educational institutions. Series of publications are coming up divulging novelties in dental education. It's my appeal to the dental fraternity that the faculty must publish the original and genuine research and refrain from plagiarism as it leads to criticism maligning the profession and the country.

Continuous updating and revision of curricula is something which must be deeply ingrained in the academic culture of a teaching temple. Each individual institute must ensure that the curricula development exercise leading to major revision in course contents and curricula is taken up every three years. Uniform Academic Calendar across all institutions should be implemented vigorously in a time bound manner and no student should suffer in his/her career mobility and

academic progression due to delays in declaration of results and issue of mark sheet.

At the end I would like to stress that the faculty should make it a point, to encourage perfectionist attitude among students while treating patients. Dental colleges must expand their services to the rural areas so that deprived population is also benefited and a humane approach with the right diagnosis and correct treatment should be the norm. Dental students must know challenges ahead and there should be proper motivation and inculcation of new ideas in them so that proper dental care can be provided to the needy. Dear Fellow Colleagues, your dedication, sincerity, honesty, enthusiasm, devotion and punctuality will definitely count and lead this profession to the zenith of glory.



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How to cite this article: Mazumdar D. Guest Editorial: Current scenario of dental education in India. *Contemp Clin Dent* 2011;2:272-3.

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