

Attitude Of General Dentist Towards Their Profession

Research Article

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Abstract

Medicine and engineering still seems to be the most chosen career and the decision in the choice largely influenced by the parents. Right attitude toward the chosen profession and the perceptions about the existing curriculum are important for any student to be successful in the college as well as in the career. A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 100 BDS (bachelor of dental surgery) students from Saveetha dental college, Tamil Nadu to assess their attitude and perception toward their profession. A validated closed ended questionnaire with 10 questions was used in this study. The information obtained were: Reason to opt for the dental course, adequacy of lecture and clinical hours, and the number and duration of lecture classes and clinical hours preferred. The proportion of the response was calculated to assess the overall attitude and perceptions of the students. Seventy nine percent of the students opted for the dental course because they did not get admission to the medical course and they considered dentistry as their second option. Majority of the students developed passion toward their profession. There was no serious complains about the existing curriculum, but a newer education model that can enhance the problem solving, and critical evaluation skills of the student is warranted.

Keywords: Attitude; Dental Students; Perceptions; Medical; Career.

Introduction

Though career guidance has evolved well in developing countries like India, medicine and engineering still seems to be the most chosen career. The decision made by the students on their career is majorly influenced by their parents.

In Tamil Nadu state, South India, there are totally 28 dental colleges: One government dental college and the remaining are either self-financing private institutions affiliated to the state university or the ones belonging to autonomous deemed universities. Most of the students in these colleges join dentistry for many other reasons apart from their interest in this field [1, 2]. They may or can develop a liking or passion after they join the course. In any field, students with positive attitude and perceptions are generally proficient learners. Social inequities also play a very vital role, and only parents who can afford to pay the fees structure set by the institution can get an admission for their children in a dental college. It has become an evident fact that the attitudes of the dental students have created an impact on the quality of care

provided by them. Future research should focus on the effect of student's attitude and outlook towards their academic and clinical performances.

There exists a complex relationship between attitude, perception and learning. Medicine and engineering still seems to be the most chosen career and the decision in the choice largely influenced by the parents. Right attitude toward the chosen profession and the perceptions about the existing curriculum are important for any student to be successful in the college as well as in the career. There are two categories of attitudes and perceptions that affect learning: (a) About the learning climate (b) about the routine classroom tasks. Psychologists have started to focus on the classroom climate as the function of the attitudes and perceptions of the learner rather than the other external factors like the quality and quantity of resources available [3-5].

Good attitudes and perceptions toward the routine tasks can help in creating a conducive environment for learning. Hence, this study was planned with the aim to evaluate the attitudes and per-

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ceptions of the dental students of Tamil Nadu toward their curriculum and profession.

Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted by the Department of Oral and maxillofacial surgery, Saveetha dental college and hospitals, Poonamallee, Chennai, India. The students from Saveetha dental college and hospitals participated in this survey. Since the study was on the attitude of the students on their curriculum and profession, only students who had started working with patients and have been exposed to all the branches of dentistry were included. Students with a minimum of 1 year of clinical experience were approached in the classroom and explained about the study. Convenience sampling was used, and a total of 100 dental students consented willingly. Hence, the final sample included 63 undergraduate students and 37 postgraduate students from Saveetha dental college.

A focus group discussion was conducted with 1 faculty member to frame the questions to be included in the questionnaire. The proportion of the response for each question was tabulated.

The population studied was almost of the same age, same clinical experience and all of them belonged to private dental institutions of two adjoining districts. Hence, no attempt was made to check any statistical difference in the attitude of the students based on their gender, age, institution, year of study or any other demographic factors.

Results

There were 57 girls and 43 boys in this study. All the 10 questions with the proportion of the choices given. It was found that 79% of the students opted for the dental course because they did not get admission to the medical course, and the rest 21% of them joined dentistry out of other reasons like their personal interest or the service of the people.

About 73% of the students felt that dentistry has a future scope is the field of medicine, while the other 27% think that dentistry has no scope. Nearly 48% of the dental students felt that their opinion about dentistry has changed once they joined the course, while the other 52% think that there has been no change in their opinion about the course. Practising dentistry after the completion of the course was preferred by 78% of the students, while the other 22% had decided to quit the course. The employability of the student after the completion of the course worried about 82% of the population, while 22% seemed fine regarding the employment after the completion of the course.

Regarding the extra-curricular activities, only 14% of the students were able to find time for their activities, while the other 86% found it very hectic and they could not find time for their activities. About 62% of the population felt that they practised ethics in their practical life, while the other 38% felt that ethics had no connection with their practical life. About 76% were happy about their professional work and found it satisfactory, while the other 24% were unhappy about their professional work. Dentistry being a noble profession, about 87% of the population agreed with the statement, while the other 13% disagree with the statement.

(Table 1)

Discussion

The scope of this study was to assess the attitudes and perceptions of the dental students of Tamil Nadu. This study was carried out in the strong belief that the behaviour of a person is strongly influenced by his/her attitude. The role of parents and Dental Council of India (DCI) has been summed up below to understand the need for the study better.

Role Of Parents

Unlike in most western countries, in India, the parents not only choose the career/college for their children but also take care of the entire cost for the course. In the existing situation, the eligibility criterion for a seat in most of the private dental colleges in India is a minimum of 50% aggregate in the board exam conducted by the government. Social inequities also play a very vital role, and only parents who can afford to pay the fees structure set by the institution can get an admission for their children in a dental college [6-8]. In the opening day of the first academic year, all the students along with their parents are explained the professional ethics and consequences associated with unethical behavior. In some colleges, a group of students are allotted to a teacher, as wards. The parents of these wards can reach to their respective teachers to follow the student's academic progress. Teachers mostly inform the parents about any misconduct of the students before taking any serious action on the student. This study was planned since most dental students join the course based on the decisions made by their parents [9, 10].

Role Of Dental Council Of India

The DCI, the accrediting body, prescribes the curriculum, details of lectures and number of clinical hours to be attended for the dental courses offered in India. The students have a particular syllabus, and academic which is set and revised by DCI and also the clinical work to be completed by the students for bachelors and masters degree during the course in dentistry. The recognition for the institutions is also granted by the DCI [11-13]. They conduct a periodic inspection to maintain the education standards in the dental colleges throughout the country. The current norms include 75% attendance percentage and 1160 working hours. In the present study, questions regarding lectures and clinical hours were asked and compared with the gold standard set by the DCI.

The Questionnaire

A validated questionnaire with 10 closed-ended questions was used. The choices for the questions were discussed among the focus group members and framed based on the existing situation in India. It was found that most of the students opted for the course because they did not manage to get admission to a medical college. 8% of them joined dentistry because of their personal interest and most of them developed an interest after they joined the course.

According to the DCI's revised bachelor of dental surgery (BDS) course regulations (2007), the total number of working hours is 1160 h; 280 lecture hours and 880 clinical hours. The students

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire.

Gender	
Male	43
Female	57
1. Which year of study are you in?	
I Year	6
II Year	7
III Year	10
IV Year	16
Interns	24
Postgraduates	37
2. What made you join the field of dentistry?	
Personal Interest	8
Family and friends advice	4
Was my second option	79
Prestige and social status	2
Service for people	3
Inspired by someone	5
3. Do you think dentistry has a future scope for development and advancement in the field of medicine or research?	
Yes	73
No	27
4. Has your opinion about dentistry changed after joining the course?	
Yes, It has changed	48
No, It hasn't changed	52
5. Would you practice dentistry after completion of the course?	
Yes	78
No	22
6. Does employment after your graduation worry you?	
Yes	82
NO	18
7. Are you able to make time for your extra curricular activities?	
Yes	14
No	86
8. Do you feel that you practice ethic in your practical life?	
Yes	62
No	38
9. Are you happy with your professional work?	
Yes	76
No	24
10. Do you consider dentistry as a noble profession?	
Yes	87
No	13

work for almost 260-280 days/year on average. Randler and Frech have shown that the time of day preference can be attributed to genetics, social and environmental factors. They showed that females are more morning oriented than males. They found that a shift toward "eveningness" began around the age of 12 [5]. But, in the present study, 84% of students preferred a morning session lecture class.

Myers has shown that the dental students accepted that the effective instructors took their teaching responsibilities seriously. They were technically competent and behaved in a professional manner during their discussions and interactions with students and patients [6]. Murphy et al. concluded that dental students prefer to learn by attending lectures and prefer instructors who use detailed visuals to augment their verbal presentations and facilitate students' note-writing during class with guided lecture notes and

handouts [7].

Limitations and Future Plans

It has become an evident fact that the attitudes of the dental students have created an impact on the quality of care provided by them. Future research should focus on the effect of student's attitude and outlook towards their academic and clinical performances. Though the names of the participants were not collected, the fear of potential disclosure could have caused some impact on answering the questions.

The authors feel that the educational system in India is very different than that of those in the western countries. A newer education model to enhance the problem-solving ability and critical evaluation skills of the student, is needed to be implemented. Clinical seminars, case presentations, journal discussions, inter departmental activities and comprehensive treatment planning sessions have to be included in the curriculum of the undergraduate course. Analytical and logical reasoning skills should be given the most importance in the dental course in India. The students will not only be benefitted, but their attitude toward dentistry and health care is definite to change [14-19].

Questionnaire

Age:

Gender: a) Male
b) Female

1) Which year of study are you in?

A) I year B) II year C) III year D) IV year E) Intern F) post-graduate

2) What made you join the field of dentistry?

A) Personal interest B) Family and friends advice C) Was my second option D) Prestige and social status E) Service for people F) Inspired by someone

3) Do you think dentistry has a future scope for development and advancement in the field of medicine or research?

Yes / No

4) Has your opinion about dentistry changed after joining the course?

A. Yes, it has changed B. No, it hasn't changed

5) Would you practice dentistry after completion of the course?
Yes/No

6) Does employment after your graduation worry you?
Yes/No

7) Are you able to make time for your extra curricular activities?
Yes/No

8) Do you feel that you practice ethic in your practical life?
Yes/No

9) Are you happy with your professional work?
Yes/No

10) Do you consider dentistry as a noble profession?
Yes/No

Conclusion

The present study showed that most of the student's attitudes, perceptions and likes were understandable, acceptable and were within the norms set by the DCI. It was also evident that the parents play an important role in the decision made by the students to join a dentistry. The authors also feel the need in the change of the curricular activities of the dental students in India.

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