A vision for education in the field of oral health

By Dr Orlando Monteiro da Silva, FDI President, and Prof. Denis Bourgeois, Chair of the FDI Development Committee

The FDI World Dental Federation salutes and strongly supports the World Health Organization’s ongoing initiative to develop policy guidelines on scaling up and transforming health professional education and training.1

It is also keen to provide advice and input into this WHO process, which in itself is part of an ongoing worldwide reflection on the future of health care and health economics.

The FDI, representing nearly one million dentists worldwide, is currently undergoing its own reflections on the future of dental medicine, consolidated by the FDI’s highly active participation in public health campaigns, most notably its work with the World Health Professions Alliance in the fields of counterfeit medicine and, more recently, non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

A ROADMAP FOR THE PROFESSION

The NCD campaign, which involved high-level advocacy within both the WHO and the UN, has made a significant contribution to the FDI deliberations over the past few months, which have yielded a draft policy document titled “Vision 2020”, set to provide a roadmap for the profession during the next decade.

In it, education is presented as a multifaceted process, with a whole of society approach, involving the health professional, health authority and patient. The vision comprises a review of current approaches and curricula—although not specifically mentioned, this could be matched by parallel strategies to develop oral health literacy among the teaching profession, in the interests of school health and prevention programmes, as well as among members of the general public. It further comprises an advocacy component to emphasise the crucial role of oral health in general health and ensure the appropriate allocation of resources to dental training and education. What is required is a sustainable economic environment to educate, train and retain oral health-care workers in adequate numbers for places and settings where a need has been identified.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

With this in mind, “Vision 2020” places under review the roles and responsibilities of the oral health-care workforce and their educational and training needs, bearing in mind the widely variable and inequitable access to care. It goes without saying that national authorities, with their unique insights into local needs, retain ownership of national procedures, standards, and educational requirements and qualifications.

In this new collaborative model, the fully trained dentist takes a leadership role, supervising a team of assistants, hygienists, therapists and technicians, as well as primary-care workers, community nurses, and, within certain settings, educators. He/she would also provide adequate training and delegate specific tasks as deemed appropriate.

This more collaborative approach to oral health care will be further fostered by state-of-the-art information and communication technologies—and mobile technology in particular—which will also improve access to expert knowledge for all, in urban and remote areas, in developed and developing countries alike.

A RESPONSIVE MODEL

This is a dental education model responsive to evolving trends and needs in both oral and systemic health, oriented towards patient care and integrated services, with a focus on transformative learning as a means of fostering critical thinking and equipping dentists for team leadership.

The model would ensure absolute compliance with the non-negotiables of the dental profession, in particular at an average of 12 years—in implementing the results of research into daily practice.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Our vision is that by 2020 young dental graduates will benefit from responsive, dynamic and modular curricula whose content will reflect state-of-the-art knowledge and technologies that can be used to provide optimal oral health care and provide learners with extensive critical thinking and analytical skills as a foundation for a career based on lifelong learning and continuing professional development.

Furthermore, sustained educational and communication efforts will have greatly improved the effective, rapid translation of research findings into daily practice. State-of-the-art use of information and communication technologies, and of mobile technology in particular, will have fostered a more collaborative approach to oral health care, as well as improved access to expert knowledge for all, in urban and remote areas, in developed and developing countries alike.

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