

Analysis of the curricular component “Patients with Special Needs” in Dentistry courses in the state of Rio Grande do Norte

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the insertion of the Patients with Special Needs (PSN) discipline in the syllabus of Dentistry courses in operation in the state of Rio Grande do Norte (RN). This is a cross-sectional, exploratory and descriptive study with a quantitative approach. The information was collected from the courses’ websites. There were ten courses in operation, with five of them offering the discipline, only one in optional mode. The nomenclature of the discipline and the semester of offer varied among the institutions. Two courses have a theoretical/practical approach, one of them clinical and the remaining theoretical. Only the four private institutions offer compulsorily the curricular component related to PSN during graduation, while the only one public institution offers the discipline, but in an optional way. Thus, it is evident the need for the insertion of contents related to the care of special patients in undergraduate Dentistry courses in RN, meeting the National Curriculum Guidelines concerning the training of a generalist professional.

Descriptors: Disabled Persons. Education, Dental. Students, Dental.

1 INTRODUCTION

The dental approach to patients with special needs occurred for the first time in the United States of America, around 1930-1935, when two pediatric dentists decided to group those individuals who presented certain deviations from normality standards, more specifically physical and/or mental disability (so-called handicapped back then) and therefore

could not receive regular dental treatment. In 1950, still in the United States, a new concept in Dentistry emerged: Dentistry for the Special Patient, replacing the term exceptional with special¹.

Currently, in Brazil, People with Special Needs (PNE) are those who have some change or condition, temporary or definitive, simple or complex, of physical, mental, social or

behavioral nature and require a differentiated and integrative approach, following a specific protocol for their care².

The National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG) of Dentistry courses in Brazil³, in force since 2002, as well as its update proposal approved by the National Council of Education in 2018⁴, determine that the graduate professional, the dental surgeon, must have generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective training, capable of acting at all healthcare levels. Moreover, Dentistry is a science that interacts with several areas of activity, which makes relevant the inclusion of Dentistry for Patients with Special Needs (DPSN) in the curricular components of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). However, Law no. 9,394, which establishes the guidelines and bases of education at the national level, assures in article 53 that the Brazilian HEIs have didactic-scientific autonomy to establish the curricular programming of each course, being each institution responsible for choosing whether or not to offer DPSN in its curricular structure⁵.

According to data from the 2010 demographic census, released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), over 45.6 million Brazilians have some type of disability, which corresponds to about 24% of the Brazilian population. The highest percentage of people with at least one type of disabilities investigated (visual, auditory, mental or motor) resides in the Northeast of the country, representing about 27.8% of the population of the region. Among the Brazilian states, Rio Grande do Norte (RN) stands out with the highest rate of individuals with disabilities, approximately 27.7% of the state's inhabitants⁶.

The treatment of PSN is still considered a challenge, due to the high demand and the scarcity of qualified professionals, whether in the public or private service. Therefore, the oral

health condition of these patients becomes greatly impaired, not only due to the lack of dental care, but also due to the higher prevalence of some oral diseases due to immunological factors caused by deficiency⁷. Thus, the purpose of this study was to analyze the inclusion of the PSN discipline in the curricular structure of dentistry courses in operation in the state of Rio Grande do Norte.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional study of exploratory and descriptive character with quantitative approach. There was no need to submit to the ethics committee, as the data collected were available at the public domain. The undergraduate courses were identified from the official and unique database of information related to HEIs: emec.mec.gov.br.

The research included all dentistry courses in activity in the state of RN in 2019. There was exclusion of those that had no official website, did not provide virtual means of communication, without complete syllabus available and those that did not have the specific nomenclature of special patients or special dentistry in their syllabus. This criterion aimed to standardize data, since the DPSN or Special Patients nomenclature has in its essence a broader concept, not being restricted to a specific group of patients with disabilities or any other impairment.

A form based on the study by Penha et al⁸. (2018) was used in this research, in order to facilitate data collection, containing information about the HEIs (public or private), the existence or not of the offer of PSN-related contents in the curriculum.

In cases of offer, the following variables were collected: mandatory or optional character, nomenclature, nature (theoretical, clinical or theoretical/practice), semester of offer and course load. The data of this research were

tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3 RESULTS

Seven HEIs offered the undergraduate Dentistry course and all met the inclusion criteria. Of these, two offer the course in different cities, totaling ten courses. Eight courses (80%)

were offered by private institutions and two (20%), by public institutions.

Of the ten courses analyzed, only four HEIs (40%) – all of them private – offer the discipline compulsorily and one public course (10%), optionally. Regarding the analysis of the nomenclature, nature, semester of offer, the results showed variability, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Characterization of Dentistry courses in RN that offer the content of Special Patients in their curricular component, 2019

HEI	Nomenclature	Nature	Semester
Private	Internship in Integrated Clinic for Special Patients	Clinical	NI
Private	Dentistry for Patients with Special Needs	Theoretical / practical	9 th and 10 th
Private	Special Dentistry	Theoretical / practical	7 th
Public	Dentistry for Special Patients	Theoretical	NI

NI: Not informed

The course load ranged from 45 to 160 hours, with an average of 89 hours. In none of the courses included in this study, the contents were associated with other disciplines, they worked independently.

4 DISCUSSION

Dentistry for PSN, currently with scientific bases, seeks a broad and integrated approach. Thus, the importance of motivating clinical practices during graduation is recognized, preparing the future professional towards a satisfactory care of those patients, since the NCGs determine that the profile of the dental surgeon should be generalist, capable of acting at all care levels, including attention to the PSN⁹.

Those people have been reaching increasingly advanced ages due to scientific and technological advances¹⁰. The early approach of oral diseases in those individuals is an important factor to establish a better quality of life. Thus,

strategies for prevention and promotion of oral health, carried out by students and professionals in the area, are necessary to achieve this objective, as well as increase the need for professionals trained to care for this population⁸.

Changes in undergraduate Dentistry courses have been observed in recent years, emphasizing the need to train a professional with a humanistic, integrative view capable of visualizing the individual as a whole, offering the labor market a dental surgeon ethically committed to society¹¹.

With the growing concern in the training of dental professionals, a study conducted in 2005 analyzed the provision of the discipline of patients with special needs by universities in Brazil through a questionnaire, sent to 175 institutions registered with the Federal Council of Dentistry (FCD), in which only 55 participated in the research and 31 of these offered the content

of patients with special needs in graduation, being 22 in the mandatory modality and nine in the optative modality¹².

This study corroborates the results obtained in this research, in which among the ten courses in RN, four have the curricular component in the mandatory modality and only one in the optional. Contrary to the results found in a study conducted in the state of Paraíba, in which 100% of the courses evaluated offered the discipline in mandatory mode⁸. At the same time, the institution has the autonomy to offer or not the discipline of Dentistry for PSN in its syllabus, since the federal law no. 9,394 ensures didactic-scientific autonomy for Brazilian HEIs⁵. However, as it became recognized as a specialty by the FCD¹³, there was a growth in the offer of this discipline in undergraduate courses¹².

Of the four HEIs that offer the discipline, two are theoretical-practical, one of which is of an exclusively clinical nature. This teaching method enables the integral development of undergraduate students, because theory and clinical practice provide the improvement of their knowledge when exposed to the reality of the community and service, bringing benefits to the student who will become more qualified and able to play an important role in the contribution of care to the special patient⁹⁻¹⁴.

A study by Jacomine et al¹⁵. (2018) with undergraduates from the Bauru School of Dentistry (FOB-USP) showed that students from the 2nd year of the course expressed the need for PSN-related content in the mandatory modality. Another study conducted with undergraduate students from the last semester of Dentistry from two institutions in the state of Sergipe revealed that the students reported the importance and need for curricular contents related to special patients during graduation, considering a theme of great relevance for the future professional⁹. Silva et al¹⁶. (2020) highlighted that the offer of

the DPSN discipline during graduation provides more security in professional performance, besides arousing interest in dental care appropriate to these patients.

A limitation of the present study was the absence of complete and official information from all HEIs in the state about their curricular structure, which compromises the process of choosing students by an institution capable of arousing their interest in studying according to the disciplines offered. Furthermore, this information should be of wide and easy access, contributing, for example, to the development of scientific studies aimed at improvements in the functioning of undergraduate Dentistry courses in the state of RN.

Even today in Brazil there is a gap in the curricular structures of dentistry courses in relation to the training of professionals to meet people with special needs, which emphasizes the proposal of a review of the NCG, which are under renovation according to CNE/CES no.: 803/2018, which awaits approval from the Ministry of Education, since the curricula of the HEI express the conception that one has about health, about the professional who wants to graduate and the role of the HEI in society.

5 CONCLUSION

Only the four private HEIs offer the curricular component related to PSN mandatorily during graduation. Between the two public HEIs of the state, only one offers the discipline, but in an optional way. Thus, it is evident the need for including contents related to the care to special patients in undergraduate Dentistry courses in RN, meeting the National Curriculum Guidelines concerning training of a generalist professional.

RESUMO

Análise do componente curricular “Pacientes com Necessidades Especiais” nos cursos de

Odontologia do estado do Rio Grande do Norte

Este estudo objetivou avaliar a inserção da disciplina de Pacientes com Necessidades Especiais (PNE) na estrutura curricular dos cursos de Odontologia em funcionamento no estado do Rio Grande do Norte (RN). Trata-se de estudo transversal, exploratório e descritivo com abordagem quantitativa. As informações foram coletadas nos sítios *web* dos cursos. Foram encontrados dez cursos em funcionamento e cinco deles ofertavam a disciplina, sendo apenas um em modo optativo. A nomenclatura da disciplina e o semestre de oferta variou entre as instituições. Dois cursos possuem uma abordagem teórico/prática, um deles clínica e o restante teórica. Conclui-se que apenas as quatro instituições privadas oferecem de forma obrigatória o componente curricular relacionados a PNE durante a graduação, enquanto entre as públicas apenas uma oferta a disciplina, porém, de maneira optativa. Assim, é evidente a necessidade da inserção de conteúdos relacionados à assistência de pacientes especiais nos cursos de graduação em Odontologia do RN, atendendo às Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais no tangente à formação de um profissional generalista.

Descritores: Pessoas com deficiência. Educação em Odontologia. Estudantes de Odontologia.

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