

Health promotion by Dentistry students in the COVID-19 pandemic: experience report

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ABSTRACT

Dentistry is a specialty in the health area that requires developing and refining technical skills. However, linked to this characteristic, there is a need for a more complex view of each context in which dentists will exercise their functions. This paper describes the experience of five students from the Extramural Internship of the Dentistry course at UNIFOR, held in the second half of 2020, during the pandemic of *Coronavirus Disease* (COVID)-19. The activities were developed weekly, on Fridays, in the morning shift, from 7:30 am to 11:10 am, in the various waiting rooms in the Medical Care Center Integrated (NAMI). The Extramural Internship (EEM) actions used simple and dynamic methodologies, valued the subjects' knowledge and subjectivities; urged the participants to reflect on their choices, contributing to the autonomy of health care for those involved in this process. Thus, it was noticed that the EEM contributed significantly to the awareness of oral health self-care and general health of patients, providing health promotion activities which explored creativity, instigated the power of perception, and playfully contributed to the analysis of the reality in which they are inserted.

Descriptors: Health Promotion. Pandemic. Dentistry.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges for teaching education refers to the transition from the centrality of the teaching-learning process of the educator to the learning needs of the students¹, an aspect that affects the meaning attributed to the teaching-learning process by the students. Although this has been a concern since the end of the 18th century, and which has been a trend in the late 20th century¹, Brazil has traditionally adopted a teaching-learning methodology

centered on the transmissibility of content². Through predominantly expository classes, this approach reduces student interaction, making the teaching-learning process less participatory².

The use of such a methodology, disconnected from other more participatory strategies, has caused obstacles and difficulties in the training of future professionals. The students' lack of motivation, the difficulty of associating theoretical contents with practical aspects, the decrease in academic performance and the

increase in dropout rates are aspects observed².

The search for paradigm shifts in the educational process continues to manifest itself at the beginning of the 21st century with the advent of the National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG) for graduation in health¹. The NCGs, by presenting a broad view of the health-disease process, provoked the students to perceive the individual in the social, economic and ethnocultural contexts, which favors a more singular and less fragmented education¹.

From this perspective, the NCGs encourage the diversification of learning scenarios and meanings, in order to meet the demands arising from the Unified Health System (SUS), such as the training of professionals with a more holistic and less atomized view.

The extramural internship configures itself as one of these formative spaces. It is a compulsory practical activity, which comprises 20% of the total workload of the undergraduate course in Dentistry, which in an articulated way and with increasing complexity promotes, through experiences, the acquisition of skills, abilities, attitudes necessary for the development of the professional future³.

Associated with the need for scenarios that favor professional training where theory and practice are integrated, it is necessary to search for methodologies that stimulate the understanding of reality and the ability to solve problems different from those usually found in intramural spaces⁴.

Society is constantly evolving and, therefore, requires teaching-learning methodologies, tools and strategies to accompany modernization and seek to help teachers and students to develop more meaningful learning².

Active teaching-learning methodologies² (MAEA) emerge as a proposal to complement traditional teaching-learning methodologies².

MAEA are methodologies that favor greater student participation, as they place them at the center of the teaching-learning process; they favor the exchange of experiences through dynamic approaches and explore the creative and reflective potential of students⁵.

Activities based on the use of active methodologies seek to develop skills and competences associated with problem solving, problematization and decision-making based on real situations, which require teamwork and the development of argumentation skills.

The University of Fortaleza (UNIFOR) is a Higher Education Institution, which typically adopts MAEA as methodologies applied to the subjects of the courses it offers⁶. Among these is the Dentistry course.

Dentistry is a specialty in the health area that requires the development and refinement of technical skills associated with scientific bases, which are essential characteristics for the future dental surgeon (DS) who chooses to practice interventional and therapeutic Dentistry². However, linked to this characteristic, there is a need for a more complex view of each context where the DS will perform his functions.

In this sense, the UNIFOR dentistry course seeks, through the exposure of its students in the internship fields, to provide experiences that complement the specific needs of this specialty, the requirements of a more holistic, problematizing and competence-based training.

In the Extramural Internship (EEM) discipline, a series of health actions are planned in the most diverse social spaces, both in Primary Health Care Units and in institutions such as the Medical Care Center Integrated (NAMI)⁶.

NAMI is a nucleus belonging to UNIFOR, which provides care in several specialties, both through the Unified Health System (SUS), and through health plans, or privately. Patients who are treated on-site can count on medical,

physiotherapy, speech therapy, nutritional, psychological care, as well as rehabilitation and social service activities. In addition to the aforementioned specialties, it also provides vaccination, imaging tests, care and clinical analysis, being a reference for the North and Northeast regions⁶.

However, a major obstacle was faced in EEM: the *Coronavirus Disease* (COVID-19) pandemic, caused by a new type of Corona virus, the Sars-CoV-2, which happened concomitantly with EEM. This situation required adaptations to the activities, which, being collective, could not be carried out routinely. Thus, knowing how health promotion activities were carried out by Dentistry students during the COVID-19 pandemic was necessary.

The objective of this article was to report the experience of EEM students in Dentistry in promoting health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 EXPERIENCE REPORT

This article describes the experience of five students from the Extramural Internship (EEM) of the Dentistry course at the University of Fortaleza (UNIFOR) in the second half of 2020.

The EEM is a discipline of the ninth semester of the dentistry course, which consists of practical activities, distributed in 4 credits. The EEM takes place in two shifts, one of which takes place at the Medical Care Center Integrated (NAMI).

Based on a demand from the institution, health promotion in the waiting rooms was the intervention proposal chosen to be developed by EEM students of the Dentistry course who, for the first time, began their activities in this institution.

This demand was captured by NAMI through the ombudsman and suggestion boxes.

Users reported idle time waiting for consultations, which generated discontent and sometimes dropouts.

The activities were developed weekly, on Fridays, in the morning shift, from 07:30 to 11:10, in the various waiting rooms existing in NAMI, such as Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Psychology, Medical Specialties, in addition to multiprofessional.

With the need for adaptation, due to the pandemic of COVID-19, there were restrictions on the number of people in the receptions, due to the need for social distancing; the mandatory use of masks; the availability of 70% alcohol gel; the non-sharing of objects, in addition to the protective barriers.

NAMI is a nucleus belonging to UNIFOR, which provides care in various specialties, both through the Unified Health System (SUS), through health plans or in a private way, and has specialized services: medical care, physical therapy, speech therapists, nutritionists, psychologists, as well as rehabilitation and social service activities. In addition to the aforementioned specialties, NAMI also performs vaccination, exams, care and clinical and imaging analyses, being a reference in the North and Northeast regions⁶.

The first activity consisted of the recognition of the internship field, through a guided tour by a technician responsible for the space, at which the students got to know the physical and organizational structures of NAMI. On each floor, they were presented to the professionals who worked there and obtained information about the work processes of each specialty, the logistics of welcoming patients and the characteristics of the assisted audiences.

This activity was crucial for the group to know and prioritize the demands of the service. As a result of this meeting, the group prioritized health promotion activities in the waiting rooms,

given that it is a way of productively managing the patients' waiting time for scheduled visits, in addition to a strategy of contribution of Dentistry to other specialties.

After the visit, diagnosis and prioritization of service needs, the group started planning the activities to be developed during the semester. Thus, based on the characteristics of each public, the physical structure of the place and the service dynamics, themes were raised to be worked on weekly. Through a brainstorm, the group listed the following topics: correct hand and food hygiene; oral hygiene and brushing methods; caries and periodontal disease; food and Dentistry; use and hygiene of dental prostheses and human health.

The group was organized so that everyone contributed to the elaboration of the activities. The methodology adopted for their composition was problematization. Devices were built for each activity that allowed the active participation of the target audience during the adopted educational strategy. For the execution of the moments of health education, the five students were divided into two groups, in order to carry out two activities simultaneously, in different waiting rooms, always under the supervision of the teacher. However, in the activity related to men's health, the five students and the teacher were together.

The first weekly activity carried out addressed the topics of correct hand and food hygiene; oral hygiene and brushing methods. The choice of correct hand hygiene and food hygiene for the first activity was prioritized due to the epidemiological situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which required more careful and strict actions to avoid contagion and greater transmissibility of the disease. The association of the topic oral hygiene and brushing methods, in the same meeting, was also manifested due to the indirect transmission of the

virus, through fluids and saliva⁷, in addition, unfavorable oral conditions can be aggravating factors for systemic diseases⁸.

The educational activity was carried out simultaneously in different waiting rooms. For this, the five students were divided into two groups. The target audience for this activity was adults, and the strategy used was a silent role-play.

In each group, at the time of the role-play, one of the students presented herself with hands dirty with paint, while the other student, without any paint, greeted the first one with a handshake and a hug. The paint represented microorganisms, not visible to the naked eye, which are easily transmitted through physical contact, which shows how easily microorganisms spread. After the role-play, the student delegated to the role of speaker rescued the previous knowledge of the audience, through questions about the perceptions that occurred in the role-play and their relationship with body hygiene measures; she also instigated the dialogue about the frequency and technique of oral cavity hygiene. Afterwards, doubts that arose during the meeting were clarified, and dental brushes were distributed to the participants.

Playful approaches are educational strategies used by Dentistry, as well as by other areas of health, to carry out health promotion and disease prevention activities. Mute role-play is one of these approaches, which affects cognitive aspects, stimulates memory, concentration and individuals' perception of the theme being worked⁹. In this sense, the choice of mute role-play was used with the aim of promoting a greater perception of the risks and care necessary to maintain health, enhancing greater adherence and transformation of care habits in the face of the present epidemiological situation.

It was noticed that this educational moment

attracted the interest of the participants, both for the unconventional playful approach, as for the chosen themes, allowing the waiting room to be a lighter, relaxed moment, giving the public, the sensation of brevity to the period of waiting for the visit.

Another health education activity addressed caries and periodontal disease. Similarly, the students were divided into two groups so that the educational moments took place simultaneously, in different waiting rooms. Prior to the educational moment, the purpose of the activity and the importance of the theme were explained. The target audience corresponded to adults and the chosen strategy was a game of myths and truth entitled “Let’s talk about caries and periodontal disease?”.

Red plaques were distributed, corresponding to the term myth, and green plaques, corresponding to the term truth. To rescue the participants’ prior knowledge, pre-formulated statements on the explored theme were released, and as they made their choices between myths and truths, they were encouraged to reflect on their answers. Then, printed color images related to caries and periodontal health were displayed, at which time the participants correlated their previous knowledge to the new information they had learned. At the end, an additional moment was set aside to answer questions arising from this exchange of experiences and distribution of toothbrushes.

Dental caries and periodontal disease are conditions that are directly related to the presence of dental biofilm¹⁰; being important, the implementation of health promotion measures, which encourage individuals to self-care in oral health.

The choice of participatory and motivating strategies, in moments destined to education, favors the development of meaningful learning². This fact motivated the group to choose the

myths and truths game in this activity.

It was noticed that although the themes caries and periodontal disease are continuously worked on in health education meetings, they are aspects that still cause doubts and curiosity among the participants. Hence the importance of approaches that stimulate reflection and the association of such themes with the care strategies chosen by the participants. It was also noticeable the enthusiasm and interaction between the participants in search of an answer to their doubts and to the arguments that arose at the time of the activity.

The next activity carried out was the one that associated Dentistry with food. The target audience of this educational moment were teenagers. This activity aimed to emphasize the importance of a healthy diet for oral health and for the systemic conditions of the individual.

The social and technological transformations that the globalized world has experienced allow greater access to foods with high energy density, which has contributed to expressive changes in the food choices of the population. This fact, added to a more sedentary lifestyle, favors an increase in obesity rates¹¹.

As the Brazilian legislation understands food as a conditioning and determinant factor of health in all life cycles¹², the group chose to develop an educational action for the adolescent public, associating the themes of food and Dentistry in a cross-sectional way.

Boxes, packages and bottles of some commonly consumed foods were used as demonstration materials, such as: boxed chocolate powder, boxed juice, corn chips, soda, stuffed biscuits and instant noodles. Plastic bags containing the amount of sugar and salt referring to each product mentioned above were also exposed. The amount of salt and sugar was previously selected according to the nutrition label of the food.

Then, the participants were asked about the amount of sugar and salt related to each product and encouraged to participate in order to rescue their previous knowledge on the subject addressed. Subsequently, the actual amount of sugar and salt contained in each food was presented, as well as the impact of food choices on the health and quality of life of individuals, adding new knowledge on the subject. The group also highlighted the possibility of replacing these foods with healthier foods such as fruits, vegetables and foods rich in fiber, emphasizing that each adjustment would always be in accordance with the reality of each user.

The patients present were very participative, demonstrating their knowledge on the subject, and at the same time surprised by the amount of sugar and salt contained in the foods presented.

To close the activity, booklets with five healthy recipes and toothbrushes were distributed, to encourage the teenagers to opt for healthier eating habits and to stimulate oral hygiene.

In the following week, the health promotion activity addressed the issue of use and hygiene of dental prostheses, whose target audience consisted of the elderly. Images printed on A4 paper were used, of patients with dental prostheses in a satisfactory hygiene situation, in an unsatisfactory hygiene situation; images of the adequate and inappropriate use of prostheses and oral alterations resulting from their misuse for the oral and general health of the patient. The use of images was aimed at identifying and familiarizing patients with situations they had already experienced, enabling them to recover their previous knowledge. Then, green plaques representing truths and red representing myths were distributed. Each image presented was associated with a statement, so that the patients could express whether they recognized it as

myths or truths. From then on, the curiosities and questions arising from this moment of educational interaction were clarified.

The result of this meeting was considered positive, as the participants, through verbal and non-verbal communication, showed interest in the theme and in the educational approach used. It was clearly noted how different images shocked them and made them rethink about the change in habits they had had for years.

At the end of the meeting, some patients approached the group and the internship teacher for clarification on how to seek referrals for their individual needs; aspect that demonstrated the approach provided by that moment.

In order to carry out the last activity of semester 2020/2, by suggestion of the teacher and the students, the topic addressed was men's health. This choice emerged as a way of contributing to the actions carried out in the Blue November campaign, an event held in that month aimed at welcoming men in health services. Within this perspective, the students decided to address five main sub-themes: prostate cancer, men's access to health services, sexually transmitted diseases, traffic accidents and men's oral health. This activity had the participation of all the students simultaneously in a single waiting room. In order to assist in the recovery of previous knowledge, red plates were distributed, which corresponded to the term myth, and green plates, which corresponded to the truth. Thus, when responding to the statements about the five sub-themes mentioned above, theorization and sharing of information were carried out, which helped the participants to better understand the aspects addressed in each sub-theme.

At the end of the activity, male condoms, toothbrushes, and brochures about prostate cancer, made by the students, were distributed.

Although initially shy, the participants integrated into the activity and identified

themselves with the sub-themes presented, so that they felt at ease to ask questions and clarify doubts.

This moment also made it possible for men to participate in health education actions, focused on unique aspects of men's health, which often becomes difficult to happen in health care units. This difficulty may be associated with several factors such as the man, most of the time being the provider of family needs; by the association of the male figure with characteristics such as invulnerability, strength, virility, aspects culturally incompatible with the demonstration of signs of weakness, fear, anxiety and insecurity, represented by the demand for health services saúde¹³.

As challenges of this study, there is an EEM internship for students of the Dentistry course in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic; prioritization of prevention activities to the detriment of clinical actions, initially causing student dissatisfaction; the resistance offered by the EEM field, in receiving the students, in the midst of an epidemiological situation, which caused great losses, fears and uncertainties.

These difficulties were gradually overcome as the students themselves and the internship field decided to learn how to deal with unexpected situations and use this pedagogical space for knowledge construction to realize in practice the importance of health promotion and disease prevention actions in the users' daily lives.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The EEM actions carried out at NAMI used simple and dynamic methodologies, which contributed to the exchange of experiences among users, teachers, students, and collaborators of the institution. They made it possible to develop educational moments which permeated aspects related to the specificities of

Dentistry, seeking intersectoriality and interprofessionalism in the execution and planning of the educational processes.

The elaboration of health promotion and disease prevention activities favored the development of competencies and skills in the students, related to creativity, the power of argumentation, collaborative work, communication skills, active listening, and the ability to bring the contents addressed closer to the experiences lived by the patients.

The educational moments proposed for the different audiences valued the subjects' knowledge and subjectivities; encouraged the participants to reflect on their choices, contributing to the autonomy of health care for those involved in this process.

Thus, it was noticed that the EEM contributed significantly to the awareness of oral health self-care and general health of patients, providing health promotion activities which explored creativity, instigated the power of perception and, in a playful way, contributed to the analysis of the reality in which they are inserted.

RESUMO

Promoção de saúde por estudantes de Odontologia na pandemia da COVID-19: relato da experiência

A Odontologia é uma especialidade da área da saúde que exige o desenvolvimento e o refinamento de habilidades técnicas. Entretanto, atrelada a essa característica, surge a necessidade de uma visão mais complexa de cada contexto em que o dentista exercerá suas funções. Esse trabalho descreve a experiência de cinco alunas do Estágio Extramural do curso de Odontologia da UNIFOR ocorrida no segundo semestre de 2020, durante a pandemia por Coronavírus Disease (COVID-19). As atividades foram desenvolvidas semanalmente, às sextas-feiras, no turno da manhã, das 07:30 às 11:10, nas diversas salas de espera no Núcleo de Atenção Médica

Integrada (NAMI). As ações do Estágio Extramural (EEM) utilizaram metodologias simples e dinâmicas, valorizaram os saberes e as subjetividades dos sujeitos; instigaram os participantes a refletir sobre suas escolhas, contribuindo para a autonomia dos cuidados em saúde dos envolvidos nesse processo. Percebeu-se assim, que o EEM contribuiu de forma significativa para a sensibilização ao autocuidado em saúde bucal e saúde geral dos pacientes, proporcionando atividades de promoção à saúde que exploraram a criatividade, instigaram o poder de percepção e de forma lúdica contribuíram para análise da realidade em que estão inseridos.

Descritores: Promoção de Saúde. Pandemia. Odontologia.

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