

The role of the preceptor in professional training in health services

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to evaluate the role of the preceptor in the training of dentistry students in the discipline "Supervised Internship in Dentistry" at the Faculty of Dentistry at UFG. A questionnaire with open and closed questions about the experiences and impressions of students, teachers and tutors from six internship fields located in Belo Horizonte was used. Eleven students, ten preceptors and four professors participated in this study. All students and professors and 50% of preceptors consider that preceptorship is part of the health professional's attributions. Most actors stated that the health professional feels motivated and prepared to act as a preceptor. All actors considered important the student's participation in internships in health services during professional training and stated that the preceptor knows about the discipline's objectives. Only 20% of preceptors said they had already participated in a preceptorship training course and 80% expressed interest in participating. The participants' perception of the role of the preceptor in the training of health professionals was positive. Some preceptors are not aware that preceptorship is part of their role as health professional. Actions that seek to train and make preceptors aware of their role in training future health professionals are needed.

Descriptors: Preceptorship. Unified Health System. Delivery of Health Care. Dental Staff.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Unified Health System (SUS) is responsible for the training of human resources in the health area¹. Dental surgeons must be

trained to carry out activities related to the oral health of the population, based on ethical and legal principles and on the understanding of the social, cultural and economic reality of their

environment, directing their actions towards the transformation of reality in favor of society. In this context, the training of dentists should include the current health system in the country, comprehensive health care in a regionalized system, with reference, counter-reference and teamwork. According to the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN), training must ensure the development of curricular internships in SUS health units in an articulated manner and with increasing complexity throughout the training process, under the supervision of teachers and professionals of the health service that receives the student². In order to comply with the Constitution and DCN, it is necessary that not only the educational institution, represented by the student and the teacher, and SUS, represented by the worker/preceptor, but also the system management and social control should be involved in the training process of health professionals. According to Forte et al. (2015)³, the insertion of the preceptor in the training process of dentists brings a new perspective in the approach to the teaching-learning process. Da Luz and Toassi (2016)⁴ reported that students recognize the preceptor as an agent of integration between them and multidisciplinary health teams that work in Health Units. The preceptor receives students and introduces them to the team and to the service. In this scenario, it is evident that the system preceptor/worker produces fundamental knowledge, practices and experiences for the training of students as proposed by DCN. The preceptor should be involved in an open, generous, critical and conscientious way with the entire internship/experience process of students.

Considering the relevance of the role of preceptors in the training of students in the health area, a study was carried out to assess the opinion of service professionals from various health areas on the preceptorship activity, as part of a broader project to assess teacher-assistance integration.

Most professionals showed interest in playing the role of preceptor and agreed that preceptorship has important impact on student training. However, many professionals recognized problems with infrastructure and, to a lesser extent, with human resources as difficulties for the development of preceptorship activities. Professionals linked to Higher Education Institutions were those who most frequently responded that they would like to play the role of preceptor, possibly because they feel more comfortable because they already develop teaching activities. Most professionals reported not finding institutional support or the offer of opportunities to access specialized training courses in family health, collective health or even to perform generalist care. The positive points most mentioned by preceptors were the possibility of their own personal development and the improvement of care⁵.

Partnerships between Higher Education Institutions (IES) and Municipal Health Secretariats (SMS) need to be revised to meet the expectations of teachers, students, service professionals, managers and the community. What IES understand as the population's health needs does not always mean, in fact, what they want; and the more the actors are involved with decisions, discussing them collectively, the more effective the benefit for all will be. The knowledge of DCN, the course objectives and the profile of graduates of each IES that establishes partnerships with the health unit also needs to be discussed with professionals so that they can understand their role and responsibility in the training of students⁵.

The Faculty of Dentistry of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FAO-UFGM) participates in efforts of the Program for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI) with expansion of 20% of its vacancies for the Undergraduate Dentistry

Course. The Supervised Internship in Dentistry discipline takes place in the last period of the course with workload of 300 hours and can be held in Health Centers of Belo Horizonte (Metropolitan Internship since 1992) or in cities in the countryside of Minas Gerais (Rural Internship since 2000). The student works in health care under the supervision of the teacher and service professionals (Dental Surgeon, Oral Health Coordinator, Health Secretary). The teacher exercises supervision at distance and face-to-face fortnightly. The preceptor has face-to-face and continuous supervision. Considering that DCN suggest that the training of students in the field of health should be based on three guiding axes (teamwork; use of the current health system; comprehensiveness in health care), it is important to know the difficulties encountered by professionals in the service with regard to the three axes to act as preceptors. In the recent change in the curriculum of the UFMG Dentistry Course, in-service training opportunities had significant expansion beyond the last training period of the course. Other periods have contact with health services, their workers, managers and the community. Therefore, a project that aims to intervene in the teaching-learning process that takes place in the service network can positively contribute to improving the training of future professionals. This study aims to evaluate the role of the preceptor in the professional training of dentistry students in the oral health service.

2 METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study, with quantitative and qualitative approach by categorization, developed with oral health professionals of Belo Horizonte who act as preceptors of dentistry students in the "Supervised Internship in Dentistry" discipline of the Faculty of Dentistry, Federal University of Minas Gerais (FAO-UFMG); as well as

students and teachers.

Currently, the "Supervised Internship in Dentistry" discipline takes place in 06 internship fields of Belo Horizonte located in the Northern region (Amélia Rocha, Jardim Guanabara, Novo Aarão Reis, Primeiro de Maio, Providência and São Tomaz Health Centers). The sample was calculated to include 1 oral health professional acting as preceptor, two students taking the discipline in these internship fields and one supervisor professor at each Health Center.

This project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at UFMG (CAAE 44100415.3.0000.5149) and approved under protocol No. 1.083.556.

For data collection, a questionnaire was elaborated, tested in a pilot study with preceptors, students and teachers who did not participate in this study, addressing open and closed questions about the experiences and impressions of preceptors, students and teachers who work in internship fields, considering relevant aspects of the role of the preceptor in the training of dentistry students.

Questionnaires were given to participants by researchers in the internship fields and collected on the same day.

Descriptive analysis of data was performed and operationalized with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences – SPSS version 18.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

For the qualitative analysis, open questions were grouped into categories.

3 RESULTS

The study included 11 students, 10 preceptors and 4 teachers distributed across the six Health Centers (table 1). Two teachers worked at two different Health Centers. Questionnaires were applied to the 3 actors (students, teachers and preceptors), with most questions being the same.

In the evaluation of actors, all students and teachers (100%) consider that preceptorship is part of the health professional's attributions. On the other hand, 5 (50%) preceptors disagreed (table 2), justifying that they do not receive extra remuneration to exercise the position of preceptor and that preceptorship should be optional.

Regarding the health professional's motivation and preparation to act as a preceptor, most responses were positive (tables 3 and 4). Only one preceptor responded negatively, justifying lack of trained staff and support of technicians. Among students, two reported that their respective preceptors were not motivated, explaining that dentists did not have time for preceptorship. As for the preparation for the preceptorship function, two dentists reported that they did not feel prepared. One explained that it was his first experience and the other did not know the extent of his role. However, even those who reported feeling prepared reported that it would be important to have preceptorship training. Only 2 (20%) preceptors reported that they had already participated in preceptorship

training course and when asked about their interest in participating, 8 (80%) expressed interest.

When asked about which skills are important to play the role of preceptor, among preceptors the answers were: patience, ability to teach, technical-practical knowledge, commitment, listening skills, perception of potentials and limitations of students. Among students, the most mentioned skills were: theoretical and clinical knowledge, time, interest, patience, ability in transmitting knowledge. Teachers considered that theoretical knowledge and knowledge about the SUS and ability to work in a team, were the most important competences for the dentist to play the role of preceptor.

Regarding aspects that participants considered most important about preceptorship activities, students reported teamwork (n=9; 81%) and relationship with the community (n = 6; 54%). For teachers, the service organization and the relationship with the management (n = 3; 75%) were the most important aspects, while preceptors reported care aspects and service organization (n = 7; 70%) (table 5 and graph 1).

Table 1. Sample composition, distribution of students, teachers and preceptors by Health Center

Health Canter	Students	Teachers	Preceptors
1° de maio	1	Teachers 1	-
Novo Aarão Reis	2	Teachers 1	2
Amélia Rocha	2	Teachers 2	2
São Tomaz	2	Teachers 3	1
Jardim Guanabara	2	Teachers 4	2
Providência	2	Teachers 4	3
Total	11	4	10

Table 2. Perception of students, teachers and preceptors in relation to preceptorship being an attribution of the health professional

Respondent	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Student	10	100.0	-	-
Teacher	4	100.0	-	-
Preceptor	5	50.0	5	50.0

Table 3. Perception of students, teachers and preceptors in relation to the health professional's motivation to act as preceptor

Respondent	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Student	9	82.0	2	18.0
Teacher	4	100.0	-	-
Preceptor	9	90.0	1	10.0

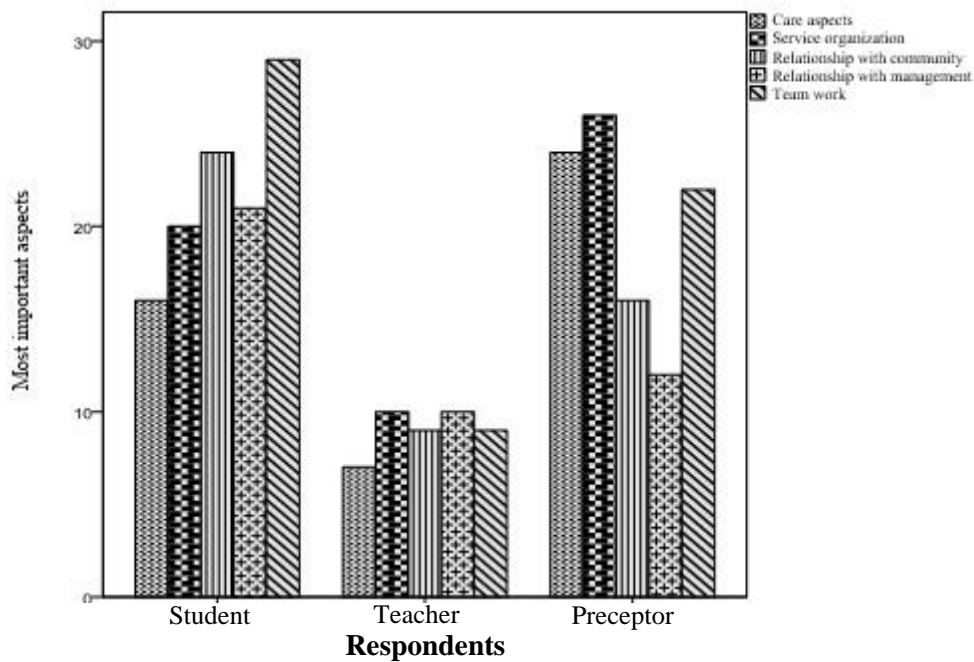
Table 4. Perception of students, teachers and preceptors regarding the preparation of health professionals to act as preceptors

Respondent	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Student	11	100.0	-	-
Teacher	3	75.0	1	25.0
Preceptor	8	80.0	2	20.0

Table 5. Perception of students, teachers and preceptors in relation to the most important aspects of preceptorship activities

Variable	Student n (%)			Teacher n (%)			Preceptor n (%)		
	3	2	1	3	2	1	3	2	1
Care aspects	-	5(45.0)	6(54.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	2(50.0)	7(70.0)	-	3(30.0)
Service organization	4(36.0)	1(10.0)	6(54.0)	3(75.0)	-	1(25.0)	7(70.0)	2(20.0)	1(10.0)
Relationship with community	6(54.0)	1(10.0)	4(36.0)	2(50.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	2(20.0)	2(20.0)	6(60.0)
Relationship with management	3(27.0)	4(36.0)	4(36.0)	3(75.0)	-	1(25.0)	1(10.0)	-	9(90.0)
Teamwork	9(81.0)	-	2(19.0)	2(50.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	3(30.0)	6(60.0)	1(10.0)

*3= important; 2= more or less important; 1= unimportant



Graph 1. Perception of students, teachers and preceptors in relation to the most important aspects of preceptorship activities

Students evaluated the role of the preceptor as very important, as preceptors show a new routine, a new vision of dentistry, in addition to exchanging knowledge and providing greater security to students in relation to dental care. For teachers, the role of the preceptor is important, considering that the preceptor is the SUS professional model for students, and the quality of the relationship with students will influence how much they will understand and learn about the dental practice carried out there. In the view of preceptors, the role they play is important, as they help students to improve their skills, to get to know the SUS, and increase their clinical experience.

All actors (100%) considered it important for students to participate in internships in health services during their professional training and were unanimous in reporting that the preceptor has knowledge about the objectives of the “Supervised Internship in Dentistry”

discipline.

All teachers and most preceptors (90%) and students (72.72%) reported that the planning is performed in a participatory manner. One preceptor (10%) did not answer this question and three students (27.28%) answered negatively, justifying that the meeting took place only with the teacher, or that the preceptor already had knowledge about the activities that would be developed and, thus, there was no need. When evaluating the planned activities, all actors (100%) agreed with the needs of the health unit and the population's health.

The relationships established between actors (student x preceptor, student x teacher, teacher x preceptor) were evaluated as good by all actors involved (100%). The work environment was considered adequate for the development of the internship by most participants. Only one preceptor did not answer this question (10%) and one student (9%) did

not consider the work environment adequate, explaining that they did not have enough dental chairs for all professionals and students. The infrastructure to carry out internship activities was evaluated as adequate by all students and professors and by 60% of preceptors. One preceptor (10%) did not answer this question. Among those who responded negatively, justifications were structural limitations, lack of materials and defective equipment.

Regarding the difficulties in performing preceptorship, dentists pointed out lack of time as the main factor, in addition to lack of resources and structure, disinterested students and lack of objectivity from the university. For students, lack of time also makes preceptorship difficult, but they also pointed out the preceptor's difficulty in transmitting knowledge and the lack of ability to coordinate the internship. For teachers, the difficulty is the busy schedule, working in health centers unprepared for the internship, and the difficulty in knowing the events that interfere with learning and its activities in real work situations.

Considering the facilities found to perform the preceptorship function, dentists pointed out the good relationship with students and team collaboration as the main factors that facilitate the preceptorship activity. For students, the most important points are: experience about the service, theoretical-clinical knowledge and good interpersonal relationships.

According to teachers, the factors that most facilitated preceptorship were: the pleasure that the dentist has in adding new knowledge to his/her routine, the commitment to the basic health unit and with supervised internship.

When asked for suggestions to improve the teaching/service integration and the role of the preceptor, dentists suggested courses and training, receiving extra remuneration for

performing the preceptorship activity, increasing the supervised internship period for students, improving the infrastructure of the health center, the presence of the teacher and more objectivity from the university. For students, the preceptor should receive extra remuneration, so that there is encouragement to perform the activity, the internship should last longer and that there should be greater dialogue between the health center and the university. Among teachers, only one pointed out the need for a permanent education process.

4 DISCUSSION

According to law 8080/90⁶, the training of human resources in the health area is the responsibility of SUS. According to DCN, the training of health professionals must ensure the development of curricular internships in SUS health units in an articulated way and with increasing complexity throughout the training process, under the supervision of teachers and the service professional that receives students^{2,7}. Dental surgeons, public health service employees, who accompany and supervise students in the internship fields are called preceptors⁸. Therefore, it is the responsibility of health professionals to act as preceptors.

Only one student and one preceptor declined to participate in the study, which reflects good response rate. It was estimated that each health center would have a preceptor, but in some of them 2 and even 3 professionals were found working as preceptors.

All students and teachers considered that the preceptorship is part of the service professionals' attributions. However, half of preceptors (50%) considered the opposite, justifying that they do not receive extra remuneration to exercise the position of preceptor and that preceptorship should be optional, suggesting lack of knowledge about

the function of their work. This lack of knowledge of preceptors about their role in the pedagogical process of training students in the health area was also evidenced by Trajman et al. (2009)⁵. A factor that may have contributed to this negative response is the fact that, in the same health unit, some professionals receive financial incentives to monitor students through the Tutorial Education Program (PET) and the Continuing Education Program (PEP), while others do not.

Most participants reported that preceptors feel motivated and prepared to play this role. Participants who responded negatively pointed to lack of time as main reason for lack of motivation. Regarding preparation for the preceptorship function, two dentists reported not feeling prepared. One reported that it was his first experience and the other reported not knowing the extent of his role as a preceptor. Many health professionals are interested in playing the role of preceptor, but point out some difficulties for the development of preceptorship activities, such as infrastructure (inadequate space and resources) and, to a lesser extent, human resource problems such as unpreparedness and lack of time^{5,9}.

When preceptors were asked about the most important skills to perform the preceptorship function, they pointed to patience, teaching skills and technical-practical knowledge. For students, the most mentioned skills were: theoretical and clinical knowledge, time, interest, patience, and ability to transmit knowledge. Theoretical knowledge and knowledge about the SUS and teamwork were the most important characteristics indicated by teachers for the dentist to play the role of preceptor.

Regarding facilities found to play the role of preceptor, dentists highlighted good interpersonal relationships and team

collaboration. For Barreto et al. (2011)¹⁰, the relationship between preceptor and student is an important instrument for performing collective work. Other points highlighted by students were the experience about the service and theoretical-clinical knowledge. For teachers, the points mentioned are: the pleasure that dentists have in adding new knowledge to their routine, their commitment to the basic health unit and to supervised internship. About difficulties reported, lack of time was the answer of the three groups. Dentists also pointed out lack of resources and structure, disinterested students and lack of objectivity from the university. Students highlighted the preceptor's difficulty in transmitting knowledge, and inability to coordinate the internship. For teachers, the most important difficulty is working in health centers unprepared for the internship.

All participants (100%) considered it important for students to participate in internships in health services during their professional training. It is believed that internships at SUS are opportunities to add professional and life experience to dentistry students⁸. Students, in general, value learning through practice in the health service, contact with professionals from other areas, opportunity for technical-operative improvement and sensitivity in relation to social reality¹¹. Internships are, with no doubt, a strategy to train health professionals with profile more adequate to the political-sanitary guidelines, with direct benefits the population assisted by the SUS⁵.

In this study, all participants were unanimous in reporting that the preceptor knew the objectives of the Supervised Internship in Dentistry discipline. IES and their courses in the health area must be careful not to impose preconceived schemes that could impair the perception of reality or pre-define work proposals for the service, but rather to adapt the

activities demanded by the municipalities to the professional training objectives⁷. The knowledge of the DCN, the course objectives and the profile of graduates of each IES that establish partnerships with the health unit also need to be discussed with professionals so that they can understand their role and responsibility in the training of students⁵.

All actors considered the role of the preceptor to be important. Each group valued different aspects of preceptorship activities. For teachers, the most important aspects were service organization and the relationship with the management, probably because this relationship enables planning the activities that will be developed during the internship, and the service organization allows activities to be carried out. Preceptors also valued the service organization, which would facilitate guidance, and care aspects. Perhaps, in the preceptor's perception, students need to improve their clinical skills and that is why the importance of care aspects was highlighted by 70% of this group. The transforming potential of insertion into the service is still little explored, considering that the relationship between service worker/preceptor and the teaching process is almost always restricted to guidance in exclusively care and specific aspects of the professional knowledge. For Da Luz and Toassi (2016)⁴, the preceptor encourages reflective thinking, facilitates even more the approximation of the student with the work carried out in Health Units, allowing them to associate the theoretical knowledge acquired at the university with the reality in which they are inserted. It is noteworthy that students did not consider care aspects as one of the most important points of preceptorship activities, which is not in agreement with the work of Leme et al. (2015)¹¹. In the view of many students, the internship interferes with the

performance of activities at the university clinic. This fact seems to be related to the idea that the internship is a parallel activity, less important and not part of the training cycle. This may be associated with the fact that its implementation takes place as a priority, if not isolated, of collective health disciplines, in addition to a fragmented view of students between private and public practice, reinforced by the extensive workload of intramural clinics.

In the present study, the relationship between community and teamwork is the factor most valued by students in preceptorship activities, probably because these activities are underdeveloped during undergraduate studies and they have the opportunity to develop them during their internship. Several points in DCN indicate the need for training focused on multidisciplinary, interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and communication with the team². The internship provides students with the opportunity to experience in practice in different environments, perceive ways of being and of unequal living conditions in the relationship with the community.

In this sample, all teachers and most preceptors (90%) and students (72.72%) reported that planning is done in a participatory manner. Therefore, planning was considered adequate both to the needs of the health unit and the population in its coverage area. This suggests that the attempt to bring academic actions closer to service activities has been positive in this discipline.

A very important issue is the relationship between actors, which was positively evaluated by all of them. Undoubtedly, this creates a favorable work environment, respecting knowledge in a harmonious and ethical coexistence. For students, it is important that teacher and preceptor are prepared, engaged and committed to the internship proposal, as the link

between theory and practice begins in classroom and in the internship with these two actors, and is built throughout the daily routine of their academic training and also throughout their internships⁸.

In only one health center, the infrastructure for the internship was not considered adequate by preceptors, and the reasons were structural limitation, lack of materials and defective equipment. According to Trajman et al. (2009)⁵, infrastructure conditions need to be adequate for the reception of students. The reduced space and precarious physical conditions are pointed out as negative points by preceptors for the development of internships. The improvement of working conditions must be considered by competent authorities so that the basic network can, in fact, constitute an adequate space for the training of students.

Only 20% of preceptors participated in any preceptorship training course and 80% would like to participate, which is in agreement with Trajman et al. (2009)⁵. According to the author, most professionals in the network do not find institutional support or the offer of opportunities to access specialized training courses in family health. In addition, the lack of clarity regarding the preceptorship function demonstrates the imminent need for universities to recognize and provide conditions for these professionals to train and develop technical and ethical skills to act in their dual role with safety and competence^{5,12}.

After the training course, preceptors move from lack of knowledge of the preceptor's pedagogical function, from the devaluation of this function by the institution and by themselves, to an opposite situation in which it is possible to explore the possibilities of the preceptorship function and educational resources.

It is important to highlight that the professional needs to be trained not only from the point of view of professional updating, but also from the point of view of permanent education. Therefore, preceptors course should seek to highlight the pedagogical potential of the work process so that these professionals remain in training in their practice scenarios, using their real problems as guiding questions for learning¹².

Regarding suggestions presented by participants to improve the teaching/service integration and the role of the preceptor, the following were highlighted: improvement of working conditions such as better remuneration and training of professionals, improvement of the unit's infrastructure and greater dialogue between the health unit and the university. A teacher pointed out the need for a continuing education process.

For Warmling et al. (2011)¹³, the new curricular paths for undergraduate dentistry should be able to form predominantly generalist professional profiles; however, this is a new training model and that still needs agreement on the way it should be performed to train these professionals.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The curricular internship in health services contributes both to the training of professionals who adequately respond to humanitarian and social commitment needs provided for in the country's health system, and to bringing the university closer to health services and the community. In this sense, it is important to know the role of the preceptor in the teaching-learning process and in health work. This professional produces fundamental knowledge, practices and experiences for the training of students as proposed by DCN. The knowledge and experiences of these workers involve issues

about daily health care, organization of health services, relationships with the community and management. It is necessary to value the pedagogical practice developed by them and greater commitment by IES in their training. This study showed that, in general, the perception of participants about the role played by preceptors in the training of health professionals was positive. The health professional was motivated and prepared to act as a preceptor, showed knowledge about the objectives of the discipline, participated in the planning of internship activities, which were adequate to the needs of the health unit and health of the population, establishing good interpersonal relationships with students and teachers, and in this way, the work can be developed within a suitable work environment. It was interesting to observe that most preceptors value the care aspects and the service organization to perform their preceptorship functions, and almost half of them consider that the infrastructure to carry out internship activities was not adequate. Half of preceptors consider that preceptorship is not part of the health professional's attributions, which denotes their lack of knowledge on their pedagogical function. This points to the lack of information of these professionals about the importance of the preceptor in the training of health professionals. The knowledge of this professional goes beyond clinical practice and also involves the relationships established within the work process, experiences that are essential for the training of students. The fact that the majority express interest in participating in training courses shows that there may be a gap in the training of these professionals to exercise their pedagogical function. Training courses should seek to highlight the pedagogical potential of the work process so that these professionals remain in training in their practice scenarios, using their real problems as guiding

issues for learning. These courses also seek to enhance the role of the preceptor and change their view and attitude towards preceptorship. Thinking about health training from the perspective of SUS implies diversifying the learning scenarios, favoring training based on health care networks, with integration between service and teaching in spaces of education and health work, where all actors play a key role.

RESUMO

O papel do preceptor na formação profissional em serviço de saúde

O estudo objetivou avaliar o papel do preceptor na formação do estudante de Odontologia na disciplina “Estágio Supervisionado em Odontologia” da Faculdade de Odontologia da UFMG. Foi utilizado um questionário com questões abertas e fechadas sobre as experiências e impressões dos estudantes, professores e preceptores de seis campos de estágio localizados em Belo Horizonte. Onze estudantes, dez preceptores e quatro professores participaram deste estudo. Todos os alunos e professores e 50% dos preceptores consideram que a preceptoria faz parte das atribuições do profissional de saúde. A maioria dos atores afirmou que o profissional de saúde se sente motivado e preparado para atuar como preceptor. Todos os atores consideraram importante a participação do estudante em estágios em serviços de saúde durante a formação profissional e afirmaram que o preceptor tem conhecimento sobre os objetivos da disciplina. Apenas 20% dos preceptores afirmaram que já participaram de curso de capacitação de preceptoria e 80% manifestaram interesse em participar. A percepção dos participantes sobre o papel do preceptor na formação do profissional de saúde foi positiva. Alguns preceptores não têm consciência de que a preceptoria faz parte de sua atribuição como profissional da saúde. São necessárias ações que busquem capacitar e conscientizar os preceptores do seu papel na formação dos futuros profissionais de saúde.

Descritores: Preceptoria. Sistema Único de Saúde. Atenção à Saúde. Recursos Humanos em Odontologia.

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