

Perception of graduation students about the importance of Dentistry's discipline for patients with special needs

Tamires Daiane da Silva*; Natalia Garcia Santaella*; Raquel D'Aquino Garcia Caminha*; Paulo Sérgio da Silva Santos**

* MSc. Student, Department of Surgery, Stomatology, Pathology and Radiology, Faculdade de Odontologia de Bauru, USP

** Professor, PhD., Department of Surgery, Stomatology, Pathology and Radiology, Faculdade de Odontologia de Bauru, USP

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ABSTRACT

People with special needs (PSN) represent 10% of the world population and their particularities, added with the lack of theoretical knowledge and clinical experience, make dentists feel unable to attend to them. Therefore, the objective of this study was to identify the importance of dentistry students in the discipline of dentistry for patients with special needs (DPSN). This is an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative study, for which data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 29 students at the end of the DPSN discipline at the Bauru School of Dentistry (BSD). Students recognized that the lack of contact with PSN during the course might cause professional insecurity in providing dental care to these patients, thus making access to oral healthcare difficult for this population. The DPSN discipline in this study enabled students to learn, live with, and provide adequate and humanized dental care to the PSN population.

Descriptors: Disabled Persons. Dental Care for Chronically Ill. Dentistry, Education. Dental, Students.

1 INTRODUCTION

People with special needs (PSN) represent 10% of the world population¹. PSN may face physical, motor, mental, and social challenges, which form their characteristics.

These characteristics may be simple or complex, temporary or permanent, regressive, stable or progressive, and may require assistance by a specialized team^{2,3}. The physical and intellectual limitations of PSN,

such as motor difficulties, sialorrhea, macroglossia, crowding, hyper or hypomotricity, mental deficiency, in addition to family discrimination and/or overprotection, may result in negligence of oral health^{4,5}. The particularities of these patients, added with the lack of theoretical knowledge and clinical experience, make dentists feel unable to care for these patients⁵⁻⁷.

This scenario may change through the participation of students in specialized care for PSN within educational institutions, in addition to the introduction of dentistry for patients with special needs (DPSN) as a mandatory subject in the curricula of dentistry courses⁷⁻⁹. In 2002, the Federal Council of Dentistry introduced a specialty titled "Dentistry for Patients with Special Needs." Nonetheless, dental care for these patients is still considered a challenge due to the shortage of qualified professionals^{9,10}.

At the Bauru School of Dentistry (BSD), University of São Paulo, the DPSN is an optional subject offered in the seventh semester of the degree. The discipline lasts approximately two months, totaling a workload of 30 hours (16 hours of theoretical classes and 14 hours of clinical practice). Limited (16) spots are available to interested students within the program who have the best-weighted average. The objective of the discipline is to enable the student to identify the systemic diseases of PSN and to determine the diagnosis and dental therapeutic approach for each case to provide safe and effective dental care¹¹. Thus, this study aims to identify the importance of DPSN for students within the discipline.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative study, which collected data through a questionnaire (Figure 1) administered to students at the end of the DPSN discipline at

BSD. The objective of the questionnaire was to obtain the students' assessment of the course taken. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions, including five multiple-choice, two essays, and one self-assessment.

The data from the objective questions were tabulated, and the answers to the essay questions were grouped according to the meaning and understanding of the questions asked. The students' identities were preserved, and the project was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee under opinion number 30228420.2.0000.5417.

The subjects within the discipline included the following: Dentistry in Oncology, Organ and Tissue Transplants, Coagulopathies, Heart Diseases, Endocrinopathies, Neuropsychomotor Disorders, Multidisciplinary in Oncology, and Interface with Speech Therapy. The practical component consisted of attending PSN in clinical activities in addition to a hospital visit to learn about activities in the field of hospital dentistry.

3 RESULTS

Two classes were evaluated. The first class consisted of 13 students and the second class consisted of 16 students, totaling a completion of 29 questionnaires by undergraduate students in the DPSN course at BSD. One student in the first class was not present on the day the questionnaire was administered, and for this reason, did not participate in the evaluation of the discipline.

All students in the first class evaluated the content proposed by the discipline as adequate. In the second class, 14 students evaluated the content as ideal. However, two students judged the content proposed by the program to be insufficient.

Regarding the content covered, all students in both classes expressed the opinion that there was coherence with the proposed objectives and recognized its importance and relevance.

As for the consistency of the subject with the proposed objectives, all students (Class 1 and 2) stated that there was coherence and recognized its importance and relevance.

Figure 1. Questionnaire for evaluating the Discipline of Dentistry for Patients with Special Needs

Questionnaire
Discipline: Dentistry for Patients with Special Needs
In your opinion, the content proposed by the program was: <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Ideal <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive
The content of the classes was consistent with the objectives proposed in the program: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No
In your opinion, the discipline workload is: <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Adequate <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive
The activities carried out in the semester were relevant to the understanding of this discipline: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No
What contribution does this discipline make to your training?
As for the didactic effectiveness offered by the discipline, clarification of questions, and the format of seminars, how would you score this from 0 to 10?
Your self-assessment from 0 to 10 for each item: Attendance and punctuality ___ Dedication to the clinic ___ Clinic learning and seminars ___ Final grade for your participation in the discipline ___
Comments and suggestions:

The workload was considered adequate by 10 students (76.92%) in the first class. Three students (23,07%) evaluated the workload as insufficient. In regard to the second class, 12 students (75%) considered the workload as adequate and four students (25%) found the

workload insufficient.

All students (100%) from both classes reported the importance of the discipline for their training and recognized that PSN requires a different degree of management from patients considered to be normoactive. These thoughts can be found within the following statements:

"I certainly felt a great reward in that, as a professional, I would be able to offer appropriate care and guidance to these patients who make up an increasingly representative group in society that demands dental care." (first class - A1)

"A new vision for the care of patients with systemic or neurological impairment, especially in relation to the practical component where it was possible to apply the knowledge of the theoretical class, was a great professional and personal enrichment." (first class - A3)

"This discipline will contribute a great deal to my training, since, in addition to theoretical content on these topics not often being addressed prior to graduation, it also taught us clinical practice and patient management, which is different from my typical training." (first class - A9)

"The discipline was extremely important for my training as I was able to learn a great deal from the discipline. I was able to better understand the specialty and experience clinical routine with patients, in addition to being a very rewarding opportunity personally." (second class - A5)

"I believe that the greatest contribution was to realize that the systemically compromised patient should not be neglected because of his/her condition

and that we have the appropriate knowledge to assist them." (second class - A6)

"In both professional and personal terms, it contributed to expanding my knowledge of the patient as a whole and allowed us to understand that we are able to serve systemically compromised patients." (second class - A16)

The students in the first and second classes evaluated the factors of didactic effectiveness, clarification of questions, and format of the seminars. There was a unanimous score of 10 for all of these questions.

The self-assessment was divided into four topics with a score from 0 to 10 for each of them. Attendance and punctuality received an average score of 9.84 for the first class and 9.59 for the second class. Dedication to the clinic had an average of 9.84 for the first class and an average of 9.78 for the second class. Learning in the clinic and seminars received an average score of 9.76 for the first class, while the second class had an average score of 9.96. The final grade for the first class was 9.76, while the final grade for the second class was 9.54.

For the first group, the most cited suggestion and comment concerning the discipline was that the discipline should have a greater number of hours focused on clinical care (23.07%). Additionally, it was suggested to consider the possibility of monitoring hospital and multidisciplinary clinic activities together with the graduate team of Stomatology at BSD (5 – 38.46%).

For the second class, the suggestions and comments on the discipline were similar; the most cited suggestions and comments were that the discipline should have a greater number of hours devoted to clinical care and theoretical classes to address other topics (43.75%) as well as the positive impact that the discipline had on

their professional training (37.5%).

4 DISCUSSION

The evaluation responses of the DPSN discipline demonstrate its importance in the appropriate management and humanized treatment of the patient who presents any type of special need. The students who were evaluated recognized that the lack of contact with PSN during the course causes professional insecurity when it comes to providing dental care for these patients, thus making it difficult for this population to have access to good oral health.

Most of the students emphasized that they would like more hours, both in clinical practice and theoretical classes, to obtain greater experience, confidence, and security in their professional life. Therefore, it is believed that discipline with the aim of focusing on PSN should be mandatory, as this would be a positive contribution to the current dentistry model. Additionally, in this scenario, all students would have contact with PSN and could offer care to these individuals.

On the other hand, there are few teachers in the field with this knowledge and specialty. Therefore, this produces a circular effect in which the reduced number of teachers to teach DPSN classes results in limited student access to the discipline. In the present study, for example, only 29 (29%) of a total of 100 students had contact with these patients and 10 (34.48%) still reported that there should be more workload. This shows that, even with having contact, the students do not feel prepared to assist these individuals in their professional practice.

This premise goes against the proposal of Article 3 of the National Curricular Guidelines (NCG)¹² where it is emphasized that the dentist must be: “[...] *Qualified to carry out activities related to the population's oral health, based on ethical, legal principles, and an understanding of*

the social, cultural, and economic reality of your environment, directing your actions towards the transformation of reality for the benefit of society.”

It is known that, in the same group of dentistry students, there will be professionals who will choose to pursue a clinical career and those who will choose an academic career or both. In turn, these individuals will not attend to PSN, nor will they teach this discipline due to the insecurity of not having learned enough during graduation or not having had any contact with this group of patients¹³.

The content taught in the DPSN discipline covers the identification of various systemic diseases of PSN, such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, transplant patients, and patients with neuropsychomotor disorders, as well as diagnoses of their oral health and dental management. The content covered was positively evaluated by the students unanimously. The non-mandatory nature of the discipline does not encourage the university to hire professors specialized in PSN, bringing us back to the issue previously discussed in relation to the limitation of students' access to this particular content.

Clinical practice was also relevant to the understanding of the discipline according to the responses evaluated. It is known that practical activities are essential for the assimilation of theoretical teachings¹⁴ and, in this discipline, there was clinical assistance to PSN. Attendance aroused students' interest, even more, suggesting a greater number of hours and the ability to monitor the patient until the end of the case. In addition to professional enrichment, there is also personnel, which allows us to say that humanization in health was also present in the care of the PSN.

5 CONCLUSION

The DPSN discipline in this study proved

to be important as it allowed students to learn, live with, and provide adequate and humanized dental care to the PSN, thus, arousing the unanimous interest of those who chose to take the discipline.

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RESUMO

Percepção de estudantes de graduação sobre a importância da disciplina Odontologia para Pacientes com Necessidades Especiais

Pessoas com necessidades especiais (PNE) representam 10% da população mundial e suas particularidades, somadas à falta de conhecimentos teóricos e experiência clínica, fazem com que os cirurgiões-dentistas se sintam inaptos para atendê-los. Sendo assim, o objetivo desse estudo foi identificar a importância percebida pelos estudantes de Odontologia sobre a disciplina Odontologia para Pacientes com Necessidades Especiais (OPNE). Trata-se de um estudo exploratório, descritivo e qualitativo, que realizou a coleta de dados por meio de questionários aplicados a 29 estudantes ao final da disciplina optativa de OPNE da Faculdade de Odontologia de Bauru (FOB). Os estudantes reconhecem que a ausência de contato com PNE durante o curso acarretará insegurança profissional para realizar o atendimento odontológico desses pacientes, dificultando assim o acesso a saúde bucal desta população. A disciplina de OPNE, neste estudo, possibilitou ao estudante de aprender, conviver e realizar atendimento odontológico adequado e humanizado ao PNE.

Descritores: Pessoas com Deficiência. Assistência Odontológica para Doentes Crônicos. Odontologia. Educação em Odontologia. Estudantes de Odontologia.

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Correspondence to:

Tamires Daiane da Silva
e-mail: tamires_psico@usp.br
Universidade de São Paulo
Al. Dr. Octávio Pinheiro Brisolla, 9-75,
17012-901 Bauru/SP Brazil