

Use of scenarios with people with disabilities and their families in dental education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to use a scenario involving people with disabilities, their families, and dental students to assess students' perceptions of the needs of people with disabilities. This is a qualitative cross-sectional study that included 60 dental students enrolled in the discipline of Integrated Clinical Care of Patients with Special Needs. Focus groups were formed and each group received a semi-structured questionnaire with questions about aspects of the care provided to people with disabilities and about their routine. A scenario was then used in which students interacted with people with disabilities and their families. In the last phase of the study, the groups formulated hypotheses about the care of these patients. The data collected in three time periods were grouped into categories and themes and analyzed using the Atlas Ti software. The results obtained were categorized according to the students' perception before and after the creation of the scenario. After the qualitative analysis, the data revealed that, before the creation of the scenario, the students placed themselves at the center of the discussion, arguing that attending to people with disabilities would be an opportunity to develop their skills without worrying about people with disabilities themselves. After the creation of the scenario, there seems to have been an important change in the students' perception of these people and of their families and the words 'respect' and 'empathy' appeared frequently in the texts produced by the students. Bringing students closer to the reality experienced by people with disabilities and their families seems to be an alternative to educate dental students.

Descriptors: Education. Dentistry. Disabled Persons.

1 INTRODUCTION

Person with a disability (PWD) is the term used to define people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may obstruct their full and effective participation in society on equal terms with other people¹. According to the latest census data conducted in Brazil, 23.9% of the Brazilian population fits this definition, which is equivalent to approximately 49 million people², demanding from government agencies actions to implement education and public health policies not only for PWDs, but also for their families.

From the perspective of dentistry, some characteristics such as physical or cognitive limitations can contribute decisively to increasing the risk of development of oral diseases³; so it is necessary to get closer to their families to promote and maintain the oral health of these people.

In particular, for PWDs, establishing a mutual collaboration program and knowing the families' routine are essential to develop students' skills. Even though course curricula are based on pre-clinical classes and laboratory exercises before actual patient care⁴, there is no consensus among dental schools on the best way to teach students these skills that go beyond clinical care⁵.

Since the 1990s, the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR), in Curitiba, southern Brazil, has offered students a discipline called Integrated Clinical Care of Patients with Special Needs, which provides PWDs with dental care. Despite the good results obtained, it is clearly noticeable that students do not feel comfortable about clinical care at the beginning of each semester. At this point, an important question emerges: do dental students newly introduced to clinical practice have the skills to

communicate comfortably with PWDs and with their families? Thus, the aim of this study was to evaluate dental students' perception of the needs of these people with the use of a scenario created for this purpose.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional qualitative study developed within the scope of the teacher training project carried out by the Teaching and Learning Center (CREARE) of PUCPR, submitted to and approved by the local Research Ethics Committee (CAAE 65161317.0.0000.0020). After approval, all participants signed the informed consent form for their participation in the study. Sixty dental students regularly enrolled in the Integrated Clinical Care of Patients with Special Needs offered in the last year of dental school at PUCPR, participated in the study.

First activity - creation of focus groups

In the first meeting of the semester, students were randomly divided into eight focus groups and received a semi-structured questionnaire about students' expectations regarding the care of PWDs and their routine. The questions were designed by the professors of the discipline in order to stimulate discussion within each group about the experiences and attitudes already experienced by students in their personal lives, including topics such as: a) expectations about the care of PWDs; b) difficulties they hope to encounter; and c) relevant aspects during clinical care, among other questions. At the end of this first stage, students were asked to formulate two questions they would like to ask PWDs or their families. This activity, including allocation to groups, discussion, elaboration of answers, and the two questions addressed to family members, lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Second activity - scenario creation

Shortly after the initial activity, PWDs and their families, who had been previously contacted, were invited to enter the classroom where the meeting was held. PWDs and their families answered the questions asked by the students and described their daily routine, their desires, difficulties faced in their daily lives, and their previous experiences of medical and dental care. Students also had the opportunity to ask and interact with PWDs, listen and share experiences, formulate hypotheses about clinical care, and think about how to improve clinical care for these people. This activity lasted two hours.

Third activity - discussion between groups

This last activity occurred on the same day, shortly after the previous activity. In this meeting, without the presence of families, the students were organized into groups once again and discussed the experiences they had with PWDs and their families during the meeting and answered two final questions: a. Has there been a change in your perception of people with disabilities and their families?; b. What did that first day of school add to you, from a personal and professional point of view?

Data analysis

Collected data in the three activities were systematically and rigorously analyzed and grouped into categories and themes according to the students' perception. The data obtained were organized in the Atlas Ti software package for qualitative data recovery.

3 RESULTS

The main results obtained were grouped into categories according to the students'

perception before and after the creation of the scenario. Figure 1 reveals the students' perception before the meeting. The students placed themselves at the center of the discussion, arguing that PWDs and their families could help them develop their clinical and communication skills. Most students also mentioned that caring for PWDs is not their professional priority and point out fear, stress, difficulty in communication, and low financial reward as major reasons, revealing a lack of altruism.

After the creation of the scenario, there seems to have been an important change in students' perception of PWDs and their families. The concern with the general health of PWDs was widely discussed and the word 'respect' (respect for family members and PWDs) appeared numerous times in the texts produced by students. There also seems to have been a decrease in the fear and stress that caring for PWDs could cause. 'Empathy' and 'respect' were the words that characterized this stage of the research (figure 2).

5 DISCUSSION

Studying dentistry is a great challenge because it requires knowledge and the development of skills by students that go beyond clinical skills⁶. Unfortunately, several learning situations are simply not included in the curriculum, which is usually concerned with developing pre-clinical laboratory skills based on theoretical knowledge, without developing interpersonal skills⁷. In practice, dental students are placed under constant stress and they are not properly prepared to deal with that yet. While caring for PWDs, the level of stress can increase as students understand that the patients are fragile and may have compromised health.

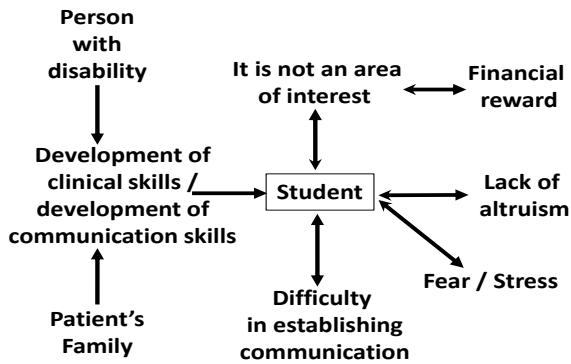


Figure 1. Conceptual structure outlined from the answers given by students **before** the meeting with PWDs and their families

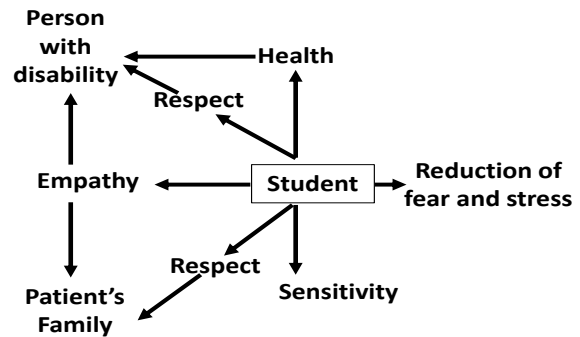


Figure 2. Conceptual structure outlined from the answers given by the students **after** the meeting with PWDs and their families

In this research, dental students who had never treated PWDs were asked about their expectations about the care of these patients and were placed face to face with them and their families before providing any healthcare. Before talking with the patients' family members, the students perceived there would be difficulty in communicating with this population and, consequently, difficulty in performing clinical procedures on them, in addition to the fear or stress triggered by the care of people who, in their opinion, are fragile. In the first case, several students mentioned they would have difficulty asking the patients' parents for details about their children's disability, showing a lack of communication skills. In the second case, most students claimed not to know how to treat these patients clinically because of their compromised health. Interestingly, other studies have already shown that, in general, dental students perceive they are not adequately prepared to communicate with patients^{8,9}.

A small percentage of students showed no interest in caring for PWDs because it is not economically attractive, somewhat showing their lack of altruism or lack of knowledge of the real difficulties faced by these people. At this point, "patient educators" can be useful because of the numerous benefits for learning, including knowledge retention¹⁰. In this research, the scenario used, with the presence of PWDs and their families, is very similar to the role played by the patient educator, giving students a "reality shock" as, in the meeting after the second activity, the words "empathy" and "respect" have emerged numerous times.

In fact, the students' perception seems to have changed after they understood the needs of each family member or PWD. Students seem to have understood that these people should be considered within a broader context, which involves socio-environmental and behavioral determinants⁶. In this scenario, the word "empathy," mentioned numerous times, is a virtue that, if exercised, can decisively modify

the relationship between dentists and their patients¹¹. On the other hand, dental schools are supposed to develop strategies to provide professionals with sufficient skills so that they can understand the specific needs of each population⁵.

Interestingly, after talking with family members, the students seem to have changed their perception of PWDs' frailty. Students reported that the confidence conveyed by parents when talking about their children's needs reduced the impression that PWDs are fragile, building up students' confidence. The words "stress" and "anxiety," often mentioned by students at the beginning of the activities, were also almost dismissed from their minds after the meeting with the parents, indicating that knowing the routine of the family and of PWDs seems to be an alternative to ease the students' stress.

It is clear that there are inequalities in the oral healthcare provided to PWDs, whether they are children, adolescents, or adults, men or women. It is also important to consider that dental students also suffer psychological and emotional consequences as a result of not being so well prepared to deal with PWDs, which can be disastrous, both personally and professionally. Likewise, bringing the students closer to the reality experienced by PWDs and their families can be a viable and easy alternative to be introduced and perhaps used to modify the curricula of dental courses.

5 CONCLUSION

This study showed that bringing dental students closer to PWDs and their families prior to clinical care itself changed their perception of these people and seems to be an alternative to

educate and train students.

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RESUMO

Uso de cenário com pessoas com deficiência e seus familiares no ensino odontológico

O objetivo deste estudo foi usar um cenário envolvendo pessoas com deficiência, seus familiares e estudantes de Odontologia para avaliar a percepção dos estudantes a respeito das necessidades destas pessoas. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo transversal no qual participaram 60 estudantes de Odontologia matriculados na disciplina de Clínica Integrada Para Pacientes com Necessidades Especiais. Formaram-se grupos focais que receberam um questionário semiestruturado com questões que exploraram aspectos sobre o atendimento de pessoas com deficiência e da rotina destas pessoas. Na sequência utilizou-se um cenário no qual estudantes interagiram com pessoas com deficiência e seus familiares. Na última etapa os grupos formularam hipóteses a respeito do atendimento destes pacientes. Os dados coletados nos três momentos foram agrupados em categorias e temas e analisados no software Atlas Ti. Os principais resultados obtidos foram agrupados em categorias de acordo com a percepção dos estudantes antes e depois da criação do cenário. Os dados obtidos após a análise qualitativa revelam que antes da criação do cenário os estudantes se colocaram no centro da discussão argumentando que atender pessoas com deficiência seria uma oportunidade para desenvolver suas habilidades, sem se preocupar com a pessoa com deficiência em si. Após a criação do cenário parece ter havido uma mudança importante na percepção dos

estudantes acerca dessas pessoas e de suas famílias e as palavras respeito e empatia apareceram frequentemente nos textos produzidos pelos estudantes. Aproximar os estudantes da realidade vivida pela pessoa com deficiência e de sua família parece ser uma alternativa para educar o estudante de Odontologia.

Descritores: Educação. Odontologia. Pessoas com Deficiência.

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