Incorporation of Interprofessional Education and Special Care Dentistry into Standard Dental School Curriculum

Marshall D. Adzima
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Introduction

The special needs population in the U.S. is increasing. In terms of dentistry, special needs is defined as individuals whose medical, physical, psychological, or social situations may make it necessary to modify normal dental routines in order to provide dental treatment for these patients. There is also a lack of dentists educated in special care dentistry. These disparities have allowed a link between oral and systemic diseases in special needs patients to become epidemic. Despite newly established accreditation standards, graduating dentistry students are not adequately prepared to engage in the treatment of special needs patients. By forming a universal special care dentistry curriculum taught through an interprofessional approach, special needs patients will not only receive better care but will also receive education in special care dentistry. These disparities have allowed a link between oral and systemic diseases in special needs patients to become epidemic. Despite newly established accreditation standards, graduating dentistry students are not adequately prepared to engage in the treatment of special needs patients. By forming a universal special care dentistry curriculum taught through an interprofessional approach, special needs patients will not only receive better care but will also receive education in special care dentistry.

Results

• There are significant links between oral and systemic diseases that, if left untreated, can lead to further compromised health of patients.
• The education surrounding special care dentistry, which encompasses the treatment of patients who have physical, medical, developmental, or cognitive conditions which limit their ability to receive routine dental care, is virtually non-existent in the undergraduate curriculum for dental students.
• Collaboration and communication between healthcare professionals can be used to increase treatment and attitudes towards treatment in providing comprehensive care for special needs patients.
• The vagueness of the CODA standards in regard to their use of “competent” in their accreditation standards is allowing dental schools leniency in their education of pre-doctoral students, especially in the field of special care dentistry and interprofessional education.
• A proposal for a mandatory postgraduate residency program has developed from the lack of a special care dentistry curriculum.

Methods and Design

This study examines the current application of special care dentistry and interprofessional education curricula through the analysis of case studies and surveys, in order to establish a reform that provides a more comprehensive implementation of classes that train oral health professionals on how to treat special needs patients.

The Problem

• Dental school staff must be educated on how to treat special needs patients.
• Dental school staff must be educated on how to teach the assessment and treatment of special needs patients from a collaborative stand point.
• There is a need to increase student attitudes towards this type of dentistry.

The Solution

• Globally healthcare professions must define a standard definition for special needs care in terms of assessment, treatment and referral.
• A standard curriculum must be established that progressively engages students in order to make them competent and confident in the assessment and treatment of special needs patients.
• There is a need for dental students to implement interprofessional education into the special care dentistry curriculum.
• It is important to note that leads to a more comprehensive treatment for patients as well as an often more inexpensive treatment plan.

Conclusion

• An extensive interprofessional based special care dentistry curriculum is necessary to better serve the special needs population.
• By gradually exposing undergraduate students to special care dentistry, through collaborative classes, virtual patients, and rotations, students’ retention and execution of their learning will be better translated into private practice.
• Incorporating special care dentistry and interprofessional education into a collaborative curriculum can potentially save patients and health care professionals time and money.
• Using interprofessional education to teach special care dentistry will increase student attitudes towards this type of dentistry.

Further Research

• Research must be conducted to determine the effectiveness of interprofessional education classes use for more than one year.
• Research must be conducted to determine if the new curriculum is able to decrease the current statistics surrounding dental professionals ability and competency in the treatment of special needs patients.

Works Cited