

ROAD TO SUCCESS OR A BLIND TUNNEL?

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**AS YOU TRAVEL THE
ROAD OF SUCCESS**



**DON'T BE BLINDED
BY THE LIGHT AT
THE END OF THE
TUNNEL**

Dentistry is no longer just the pulling out of teeth, but an emerging branch of medicine with the emphasis on conservation of tooth, replacement of teeth with life-like appearance, relieving a person's pain and improving his smile. In ancient history of Indian medicine and ayurveda, dentistry was having its existence as a part and parcel of medicine for good health. Despite the pace at which dentistry is moving forward the biggest fact still remains that the new brigade of budding dentists is in a dilemma.

Dentists are amongst the 5% highest paid professionals in the western world, whereas in India they are struggling to earn a decent livelihood, barring a few. Although, there is a high burden of oral diseases in the country but there are few job opportunities in India, amounting to stress amongst the dental students.

Dental education has been

regarded as a complex, demanding and often stressful instructive exposure, involving an acquisition of required academic, clinical and interpersonal skills during the course of learning, with a dental college known to be a highly demanding and stressful learning environment.

Common sources of the stress to the students include meeting the requirements of the curriculum, achieving good grades, fear of failing, approachability to the staff and patients being late or not showing up for their appointments. Other causes include change in sleeping and eating habits, an increased work load and new responsibilities and stress about finding a good job after graduating.

The duration of Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme is of five years, governed by the Dental Council of India. The fee for studying dentistry is the highest for any undergraduate programme next only to medicine and as compared to medicine, although there is a high burden of dental disease in the country, there are currently hardly any job opportunities for dentists in India. A main reason for this is that there is no oral health policy in India at the national level, and in many states there are no dental services

provided under the public health sector. Consequently, job opportunities for fresh undergraduates are solely concentrated in the private sector, leading to an increased competition, thus limiting the earnings.

High levels of stress may result in mental and/or physical ill health, substance misuse, absenteeism and diminished efficiency at work or learning, quite evident among dental students, which is higher even when compared with other students of health professions.

With increasing awareness amongst the urban population and the stiff competition that dental graduates face, there has been an increase in the number of aspirants for postgraduate courses. A heavy competition exists to achieve admission for postgraduate studies, leading to an increase in the number of unemployed dental graduates. The number of seats available for M.D.S. is only around 3,000 compared to 25,000 B.D.S. students graduating every year. Dentistry is regarded as a flourishing industry in the western world, and the budding Indian dentists are in stress.

Majority of the dental graduates, given a chance, would like to migrate to other countries. The reason for migration is the monetary benefits that the dentists get in most of the developed countries. The facilities in the developed countries are more advanced, easily accessible, and promising as compared to those available in India. Those aspiring to rise in research and academics also prefer to go abroad.

Increased awareness of Indian patients has also raised their expectations from the dental practitioners. Awareness about the dental education among Indian population has also decreased the charm of B.D.S. degree alone and more number of patients tries to consult a specialist for their problems. But the disappointing ratio of number of post graduation seats to the number of fresh graduates passing out is a bottleneck in the career prospects of a dentist. A large number of candidates also want to go for government jobs, but are disappointed due to very limited vacancies.

The National Urban and Rural Health mission programmes provide effective health care to the rural as well as poor urban population, especially the disadvantaged groups including women and children, by improving access, enabling community ownership and demand for services, strengthening public health systems for efficient service delivery, enhancing equity and accountability and promoting decentralization. These programs are not only beneficial for the people but also provide employment to healthcare professionals. Unfortunately, there are no such programmes for oral and dental healthcare. In a country where 60% have never visited a dentist and 75% of people clean their teeth only once or less than once a day, such programs are a must.

A number of changes need to be considered in the curriculum of dentistry. Students wishing to study

dentistry should be exposed to the nature of the profession and the study environment prior to applying to this program. There should also be a provision of an entrance interview to evaluate the candidate's interest and suitability for the course. Dental colleges should collaborate with educational experts in designing and developing a curriculum structure which is more student-orientated, aimed at enhancing the students' psychological well-being whilst maintaining a focus on academic and clinical performance and producing graduates with a positive professional attitude. A stress reduction program could be implemented. Such programs for dental students as including specific courses, stress-reduction sessions, introduction to behavioural sciences and faculty incorporated advising systems foster coping behaviours that are useful on a daily basis, as well as preventative measures to reduce chronic stress effects.

It is now time that the policy makers of Indian health system like the government of India, various state governments and the dental council of India look into the matter to increase the number of M.D.S. seats in government as well as private colleges under government quota; create jobs in the government, private and semi-government sectors; conduct orientation courses regarding future prospects in various dental colleges of India, create counseling cells in each and every dental college to combat stress amongst dental students, and launch programmes similar to National Urban and Rural Health missions for dental and oral healthcare.