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Dental education in the 21st century: A comprehensive approach for new generations

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Although there have been many calls for dental education to move to comprehensive training, many have remained in rhetoric. However, recently the strategic analysis of the American Dental Association of Education recommended a curriculum transformation to engage students in life-long learning and nurturing an educational community with well-qualified teachers to mentor students and model the values of the profession (Formicola et al., 2018).

Reimagining dental education demands a curriculum that considers the unique characteristics of learners. The *generation to come* has grown in a globalised world where information about what is happening in remote geographical places is quickly available, which has shaped their cultural and political points of view. Their idealism and advocacy have marked how they relate to patients. As part of the inherent characteristics, students thrive in experiential learning and rely on the internet and multimedia content. Therefore, incorporating technology is a must for engaging them in meaningful learning activities.

Instead of theory-oriented education, institutions should foster learning environments that depict the immediate community's health challenges, for example, childhood caries, poor access to dental care, and the increase in the number of people with untreated oral conditions. A starting point is to transition to context-rich educational experiences where students can make a positive social impact. While doing so, they honour their social

commitment to patients and families and transform into health advocates.

Additionally, this comprehensive approach needs to nurture a professional that can work within a health system. Dentists that are successful in practice are immersed in a community and have an interdisciplinary approach to deliver quality care. To achieve this competence undergraduates, need more opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, engage in self-assessment of performance, provide, and receive feedback to spark growth, and practice evidence-based decision-making (Kornegay et al., 2021).

Considering the evolution of technologies and the emergence of diseases, it is impossible to think that dental training has not changed. However, the unique profile of the new generation of students demands that we accelerate the change process. Learners have raised to the challenge and have demonstrated their will to positively impact their communities and society. The call for action for educational institutions is to embrace a new vision for a wide comprehensive dental education model where students learn from dental sciences and medicine to advocacy and ethics.

Notes on Contributors

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Declaration of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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