



Motivate dental professionals to be the best they can be

The core values taught and encouraged in dental school stay with the practitioner for arguably their whole career. During this education period, faculty members are considered by students as mentors and teachers. A professor has the ability to make a positive impact on a dental student's education with their expert opinion, guidance, and the strive for excellence they project. In order to make an impact, there needs to be a balance between pushing the student to achieve more and accepting their limitations. More than ever, educators might be lowering their expectations and coddling students because of the preconceived opinion that students do worse in demanding situations. The field of dentistry is demanding for a practitioner and students should be exposed to similar conditions early on. A relaxed and easy-going learning environment gives students the sense that they can achieve the acceptable without putting in a lot of time and effort. The pass/fail system adopted by many dental schools is an example of how a dental student can get by just fine without having excellent work ethics or achievements. Another example is the option, sometimes given to students, to excel in didactic components and be sub-par in clinical areas, or vice versa. Some dental schools do not put equal weighting on didactic and clinic sections, allowing students to believe they only need to do well in one section to complete a course. A student will struggle later on as a practitioner if they are not able to master both components.

There is a need in dental schools for clinical teaching of the highest standard possible. Too often students are "cutting corners" because they are taught that it is ok to do so for educational or other purposes. Instructors need to be clear in their disapproval of skipping or changing steps that the student believes will save them time, and disagree with any procedure that is performed for merely the sake of the students' experience, but not benefit (and sometimes even may harm) the patient. If this urge to "cut corners" is not looked down upon in school, then the student will display similar behavior in the future. The habits acquired by students in dental school will carry on into their professional career. Therefore, it is necessary to

create a learning environment that encourages students to work hard constantly without looking for an easy way out. To work hard means to be able to prioritize and plan so that you are able to keep a balanced lifestyle while excelling in your career. The claim that working too hard is not good for one's health might indicate sometimes a problem with time management rather than true hard work. As a dental professional, every day is a new challenge and to have the skills to tackle each challenge in the best way possible should be learned and practiced early on.

Additionally, some dental schools have taken a step towards reducing their competitive nature by concealing class rankings. If the student is not aware of where they stand in comparison to their classmates, how do they know they should improve? Healthy competition can increase motivation, improve performance, and provide validation. As students and practitioners, the goal should always be to be the best for our patients. To complete the minimum requirements for graduation is not enough in order to be an excellent practitioner. We should strive to educate and graduate excellent practitioners. There are no shortcuts to becoming a good practitioner. Dental students therefore should not be encouraged to think it is all right to do the bare minimum, as this will not benefit them in the long run. Health care providers should be active lifelong learners who take initiative in their continuous education. Dentistry is an evolving field and it is easy for a clinician to be left behind if they do not keep up with new information. An active learner is an individual who takes interest in their field of study and is motivated to learn in a meaningful way. A practitioner who does not wish to learn beyond what is taught in dental school is the exact opposite of an active learner. In the end, it is the patient who suffers the most from an unmotivated or "minimally competent" practitioner.

In order to provide better treatment and care to the public, dentists must be shaped into lifelong learners starting from dental school. There are a number of ways that dental faculties can encourage students to take more initiative in their educa-

tion. Professors should push students to give maximum effort in all aspects of their education, rather than giving them a false sense that failure is expected and normal. A pass/fail system is a step in the wrong direction because it allows students to have an attitude of “all I need to do is pass.” Students that spend a great deal of time and effort in their education are considered the same as those who barely pass. After graduation, this won't be the case. The students who work hard will see better outcomes in the future and their patients will probably receive better care. It is the dental school's responsibility to create an environment that simulates the real world and encourages students to excel and develop constantly. Anything less would only make it more difficult for the new graduates.

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