

The Standard of Newly Qualified Dental Graduates – Foundation Trainer Perceptions

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Abstract

Background: The dental education is considered to be a much desirable and a demanding professional field. It requires the students to acquire a diverse collection of skills and related comprehensive theoretical knowledge within the given time span of graduation. There is a perceived need to prove to students, to the dental profession, and to the public at large that students graduating from the college are well equipped to address the changing oral health-care needs of the community. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the standard of newly qualified dental graduates. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the standard of newly qualified dental graduates. The questionnaire was converted to an electronic version used to collect the outlook of the newly qualified dental graduates. The questionnaire was closed ended with a value on a Likert-type scale in ten areas. The collected data were analyzed and descriptive statistics were done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0v (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). **Results:** A total of 150 respondents completed the survey. The most acute trend for a perception of declining standards is in behavior, with a score of 2.08. In contrast, professionalism enjoys a score of 3.94 suggesting an improvement over time. **Conclusion:** The main weak points of the newly qualified dental graduates were found to be interpersonal relationships (student-teacher relationship) and the behavior issues.

Keywords: Dentists, Graduates, Perception, Standard.

INTRODUCTION

The dental education is considered to be a much desirable and a demanding professional field.^[1] It requires the students to acquire a diverse collection of skills and related comprehensive theoretical knowledge within the given time span of graduation.^[2,3]

Over the past few years, the number of dental undergraduates has grown. There is already a perception that the new generation of graduates is not as well prepared for clinical practice as their predecessors and the growing concern is that by increasing numbers of undergraduates in training this will further dilute their clinical experience and result in them being less well prepared for the clinical demands that they will encounter in foundation training.^[4,5] Clearly, it is important to monitor this interface and be able to identify precise shortcomings in new graduates' training rather than rely on weak, non-specific circumstantial data.^[6]

Cabot and Radford, however, are not convinced of the fundamental premise and have leapt to the defense of today's graduates by questioning whether selective recall is at work and argue that although today's students are very different to those of the past, they are not worse.^[7]

Robust data facilitate informed discussions between dental foundation trainers and dental schools so improving the new graduate's preparedness for the next stage in their training and clarifying the expectations of experience and competence by both undergraduate tutors and dental foundation trainers.^[8,9]

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There is a perceived need to prove to students, to the dental profession, and to the public at large that students graduating from the college are well equipped to address the changing oral healthcare needs of the community.^[10,11] Therefore, this study aimed to assess the standard of newly qualified dental graduates.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the standard of newly qualified dental graduates. Only those dentists who gave consent were included for the study. The ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Institution Review Board of the college [DJD06/336/2021].

The questionnaire was converted to an electronic version used to collect the outlook of the newly qualified dental graduates. The questionnaire was closed ended with a value on a Likert-type scale in ten areas. Data were collected between September 27, 2021, and October 10, 2021, and the collected data were exported to a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel (2007).

Statistical analysis

The collected data were analyzed and descriptive statistics were done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0v (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

RESULTS

The study was conducted among 159 dental graduates among which 150 provided the entire data. Out of the 150 study participants, 28.7% were female and 71.3% were male. About 32.7% have 1–3 years, 49.3% 3–7 years, and 18.0% >7 years teaching experience as a faculty (Table 1). Table 2 considering the 10 areas tested individually, there were substantial differences. Only a very small minority (3.4%) felt

Demographic characteristics	Number (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
Gender			
Male	107 (71.3)	35.4	4.508
Female	43 (28.7)		
Age groups			
30–34	80 (53.4)	1.29	0.454
35–39	43 (28.6)		
40–44	27 (18.0)		
Years of postgraduate experience			
1–3 years	49 (32.7)	1.65	0.770
3–7 years	74 (49.3)		
>7 years	27 (18.0)		
Teaching experience as a faculty			
1–3 years	49 (32.7)	1.65	0.770
3–7 years	74 (49.3)		
>7 years	27 (18.0)		

that standard of current graduates is unsatisfactory in the area of professionalism. In contrast, when asked “Do you think the standard of current graduates is satisfactory in the area of behavior?” only 58.6% responded positively. The numbers of responses are set out in Table 2 with the valid percentage of respondents who said “Yes” allowing the areas to be set out in rank order. Table 3 illustrates the ranking which shows that the most acute trend for a perception of declining standards is in behavior, with a score of 2.08. In contrast, professionalism enjoys a score of 3.94 suggesting an improvement overtime.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical quality of dental courses in India is of adequate standards being comparable to the quality of dental courses in the foreign countries.^[2] However, there is anecdotal evidence that training of dentist has been diluted over the last few years and new graduates are not as capable, practically, as they once were.^[12] Hence, this study was conducted with an aim to assess the standard of newly qualified dental graduates.

Table 2: Responses to “Do you think the standard of current graduates is satisfactory in the area of...?”

Area	No	Yes	Valid percentage of respondents who said “Yes” (%)	Rank
Professionalism	5	145	96.6	1
Communication skills	18	132	88	2
Patient assessment	24	126	84	3
Diagnosis	26	124	82.6	4
Management and leadership	34	116	77.3	5
Treatment planning	43	107	71.3	6
Treatment skill/clinical expertise	44	106	70.6	7
Health promotion and disease prevention	51	99	66	8
Interpersonal relationships (student-teacher relationship)	57	93	62	9
Behavior	62	88	58.6	10

Table 3: Trends: Rank order of trends (1 for high decline, 2 for some decline, 3 for no change, 4 for some improvement, and 5 for high improvement)

Area	Average score	Rank
Professionalism	3.94	1
Communication skills	3.90	2
Patient assessment	3.82	3
Diagnosis	3.27	4
Management and leadership	3.27	5
Treatment planning	2.87	6
Treatment skill/clinical expertise	2.62	7
Health promotion and disease prevention	2.41	8
Interpersonal relationships (student-teacher relationship)	2.36	9
Behavior	2.08	10

A total of 150 respondents completed the present survey. In 2017, 312 respondents completed the study survey by Oxley *et al.*^[13] Dental students' perspectives about their clinical training can be a major influence for change in how dentists are trained.^[14]

In the present study, only a very small minority (3.4%) felt that standard of current graduates is unsatisfactory in the area of professionalism and in contrast, when asked "Do you think the standard of current graduates is satisfactory in the area of behavior?" only 58.6% responded positively. In a study by Oxley *et al.*,^[13] the largest majority of respondents felt that the standard was unsatisfactory in the field of crown and bridge while the standard was found most satisfactory in the area of health promotion and disease prevention.

It is interesting to observe that respondents largely affirmed duration of training and the skills acquired during training were adequate for general dental practice while at the same time insisting faculty and support staff needed to do much more to enhance training of future graduates.^[14]

CONCLUSION

The newly qualified dental graduates were cited to have weaknesses on mainly two key areas. The first was interpersonal relationships (student-teacher relationship). The second area was behavior issues. The high expectation by trainees, including general dissatisfaction with clinical support staff, might have been due to the relative immaturity of trainees who probably expected to be "spoon fed" in most areas of their training. Moreover, this may be the reason for the issues in interpersonal relationships and behavior issues of students.

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