

Editorial

Geriatric Dentistry and Need of Formal Education

Increasing numbers of old age people and the decreasing rates of edentulism highlight the importance of dental education that focuses on aging and oral health. Oral health is an essential component in general health.¹ Careful consideration of all coexisting medical problems before initiating treatment is a cardinal rule in geriatric oral care.² Awareness and knowledge would facilitate the creation of separate health care units for the elderly along with oral health care clinics.³ The educational goal of gerodontology is to raise the awareness of barriers to care and to prepare dental students' knowledge, attitudes, ethics and skills to provide appropriate oral health care for the older adults. The educational messages should be developed to address oral health knowledge gaps and to help facilitate understanding of oral diseases among elderly adults with varying literacy levels.⁴ Lack of training results in a poor understanding of the special needs of older adults. Anehosur and Nadiger⁵ studied the attitude towards the elderly population in 98 fifth-year-students. They concluded that there is a need to change the students' perspective towards the older adults by including geriatric dentistry in the dental curriculum. Exposure of students to didactic and clinical setting appears to be a critical element towards positive knowledge and attitude of the older adults.⁶ Without adequate training and with no personal experience of growing old, young graduates may not be able to understand the physical, socioeconomic, and psychological problems of the older adults and the complexities involved in treatment planning for patients with multiple chronic diseases and medication.⁷ Influence of early clinical exposure for undergraduate students on self-perception of different aspects of geriatric dental care has been studied by Patil et al⁸ in two colleges from Japan and India. They concluded that early clinical exposure to the undergraduate students helps improving their self-perception regarding the different aspects of the geriatric dental care including subject knowledge, communications, diagnosis, and treatment planning.⁸



As compared to pediatric dentistry, geriatric dentistry is not as well-developed throughout the world. Since the ratio of the older adults to that of the pediatric population is approximately 7:35,¹ there are more speciality clinics and post-graduation speciality courses in pediatric dentistry. But looking at the geriatric population and its special needs, there are proportionately only a few geriatric care centers or specialty courses and very little formal training has been introduced in the dental curriculum worldwide. With this editorial, I take an opportunity to highlight the necessity of developing a formal geriatric dentistry curriculum for undergraduates and to generate geriatric dental specialists who can help to create a positive oral care attitudes towards the older adults worldwide.

References

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International Journal of Prosthodontics and Restorative Dentistry
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