Improving Oral Health Outcomes Through Better Assessment of Students' Clinical Competence

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A critical review of research literature reveals that accreditation, quality assurance and ‘fitness to practise’ mechanisms are putting increased pressures on dental schools to ensure that dental and oral health graduates are competent to perform a range of treatments effectively and safely with real patients from early in their educational programmes. Research has also shown that assessment criteria and systems impact on the oral health outcomes of these patients. It follows that it is an opportune time for academics and teachers to review and improve the mechanisms for assessment of clinical competence in dental schools. As part of this improvement, it is also appropriate to question the continued use of public sector patients viewed as ‘teaching fodder’ for students (student focus) instead of willing and paying clients who play an active role in the students’ education and training (patient focus).

As dental patients are alert during students’ education and training, they are able to hear what is being said as well as see and feel what is happening during their treatment. In the case of child dental patients, their parents/caregivers are also present observing the process. It is not surprising to know that supervisors’ assessment and feedback to students is often ‘guarded’ or ‘altered’ so that patients are not upset or troubled during this dynamic and volatile process. Students can also find this learning process stressful, upsetting and frustrating.

In order to improve the teaching and learning process for supervisors, students and patients alike, research will be conducted with current and former patients of the dental clinic at Griffith University to ascertain themes and issues relating to patient satisfaction and the perceived adequacy of the assessment of clinical competence. By moving the focus from ‘students’ to ‘patients’ improvements can be made to the criteria and systems of assessment of dental students’ clinical competence. As a result, oral health outcomes of patients should be improved.

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References:


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