

Addressing Dental Education Curriculums for Treating Persons with Special Needs

Michigan Department of Community Health ~ Oral Health Program
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Goal 19, action step 10 of the Michigan State Oral Health Plan, states to “meet with the School of Dentistry to discuss changes in the curriculum and increased experience for dental students to improve their aptitude for treating special needs patients.” Upon further research into special needs and curriculums, it was discovered that the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) made a change in their accreditation requirements. At the “July 30, 2004 meeting, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (of the American Dental Association) adopted revisions to both the Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs and the Accreditation Standards for Dental Hygiene Education Programs with an implementation date of January 1, 2006.”¹ CODA has adopted a new standard (Standard 2-23) for both dental and dental hygiene students alike, and reads, “Graduates must be competent in assessing the treatment needs of patients with special needs.”¹

CODA defines *patients with special needs* as “Those patients whose medical, physical, psychological, or social situations make it necessary to modify normal dental routines in order to provide dental treatment for that individual. These individuals include, but are not limited to, people with developmental disabilities, complex medical problems, and significant physical limitations.”²

CODA has addressed special needs as a requirement in their *Accreditation Standards for Dental Hygiene Education Programs, Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs, and Accreditation Standards for Advanced Education Programs in General Practice Residency*. These forms can easily be viewed at: <http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/accred/standards/index.asp>.

Dental hygiene students attending an accredited institution in Michigan, upon graduation must be “competent in assessing the treatment needs of patients with special needs.”³ CODA further explains that “clinical instruction and experiences with special needs patients should include instruction in proper communication techniques and assessing the treatment needs compatible with these patients.”³

Dental students attending a four-year accredited dental program in Michigan, upon graduation “must be competent in assessing the treatment needs of patients with special needs.”⁴ CODA states that “an appropriate patient pool should be available to provide a wide scope of patient experiences that include patients whose medical, physical, psychological, or social situations may make it necessary to modify normal dental routines in order to provide dental treatment for that individual. These individuals include, but are not limited to, people with developmental disabilities, complex medical problems, and significant physical limitations. Clinical instruction and experience with the patients with special needs should include instruction in proper communication techniques and assessing the treatment needs compatible with the special need. These experiences should be monitored to ensure equal opportunities for each enrolled student.”⁴

Residents attending a two-year accredited General Practice Residency program, prior to graduation, must have hands-on experience with special needs patients. CODA addresses that “the program must have a curriculum plan that includes structured clinical experiences and didactic sessions in dentistry and medicine, designed to achieve the program’s goals and

objectives for student/resident training or the program's competencies and proficiencies.”⁵
The students will “assess, diagnose, and plan for the provision of multidisciplinary oral health care for a wide variety of patients including patients with special needs.”⁶

Although it is not required that higher learning educational institutions go through the accreditation process with the American Dental Association's CODA, all of the dental and dental hygiene schools within Michigan are accredited institutions. Michigan has two universities which house its dental schools, University of Michigan (U of M) and University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). Michigan has an additional thirteen dental hygiene schools within the state which are all accredited institutions. Both U of M and UDM offer additional residency programs. U of M has a *General Practice Residency Program in Dentistry* which addresses special care needs within the curriculum. UDM has an *Advanced Education in General Dentistry* program which concentrates on teaching its students to be proficient on a wide range of patient populations, including special needs. Since these universities are teaching these curriculums to their students, there is no need to create or locate curriculums for them.

However, if needed, there are curriculums that surface within internet searches which target specifically on the oral care of the special needs population. They are available for purchase in different locations. There are also manuals on how to create your own curriculum. One can be located at http://www.bsdh.org.uk/misc/Teaching_doc_06july04.pdf. Therefore, a higher education institution would need to investigate their specific needs and research to find their specific curriculum that they would like to teach within their institution, and purchase the curriculum for their institution.

References

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