


Challenges in the training of Dentistry students in public universities in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

For decades, Brazil's public universities have suffered from budget cuts, inadequate management of public assets and purse, and an increasingly precarious condition for teaching and learning. This, not only in terms of the physical structure, equipment and consumables, but also with regard to the valorization of work in this environment and the support of human resources, for technical, administrative and teaching activities. The objective of this chapter is to describe the challenges for the training of students in the undergraduate course in Dentistry. A report based on the experiences as teachers in public institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) and by the claims listed by students.

Keywords: Dentistry, Dental education, Academic performance.

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INTRODUCTION

THE DENTISTRY COURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FINANCING OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

The higher education system in Brazil has a great diversity of structure and organization, with economic, social and cultural variables, among others. When we refer to public Higher Education, it is maintained by the government, at the federal, state or municipal level; where the executive branch represents the largest accountability for the overall budget (Michel, Olsson, Toassi, 2019; Pinto *et al.*, 2013).

The form of budget composition of public universities, associated with a contingency of funds, has been the target of criticism and questioning as to its effectiveness. How can "autonomy" be established if many HEIs do not even have a system for calculating and measuring costs, capable of assisting them in decision-making (Caetano and Campos, 2019).

Specifically with regard to the undergraduate course in Dentistry, this represents one of the courses with the need for a higher cost for investments, due to the characteristics inherent to this specialty in the health area; mainly regarding equipment, consumables, instruments and setting for theoretical, theoretical-practical laboratory and clinical activities, in addition to supervision in internships and community assistance services.

In this scenario, training in health economics can be important to achieve efficiency in the allocation of resources directed to health care; for decision-making regarding the optimization of the resources offered or available; assisting managers in this direction (Pokhilenko *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, ensuring universal access to the course in question, to the maintenance of academics (avoiding dropout), with the necessary support for the difficulties, specificities or demands presented, and to lead to an education based on ethics, on the dimensions of human diversity, on the protagonism of the student and their critical thinking, does not represent a simple mission. This, in addition to stimulating the awakening of entrepreneurship, comprehensiveness and interdisciplinarity, in the care of human beings.

Contrary to what was previously reported, the public university, with such disputed access and recognition "of excellence" or "reference", both for training and for the care of human beings, has been constantly degraded. For more than a decade, with the change in the way budget is implemented, there have been negative impacts, including for internship options, where private HEIs have assumed a priority in vacancies, often due to the financial advantages they can offer.

As a reflex, there is an "illness" of the Dentistry Courses of public universities, especially at the federal level. If, on the one hand, there is an emphasis on scientific production, the production of patents and the training of new researchers and professors, on the other hand, there are worrying limits in infrastructure, access to basic conditions for quality teaching and care for all involved.



Teachers with an overload of work, which encompasses many aspects of a growing and constantly changing bureaucracy; in addition to other activities not directed to the exercise of teaching, but which become part of the routine of university professors, due to the lack of resources, support, recognition and encouragement in the work environment. And this is reflected, especially in those with an exclusive dedication and who leave the essential north of teaching, research and extension, to meet various demands, where there is an imminent risk of loss of quality in the exercise of teaching. This exercise requires the perception and understanding of the human condition, of the way in which subjects are constituted, through training processes (Bruxel and Boufleuer, 2021).

Currently, we have more Dental Surgeons (DCs) in Brazil than in other countries in the world, proportionally. The national market is not able to effectively absorb the skilled workforce and, on the contrary, there is no "brake" on the opening of new private HEIs with the offer of Dentistry and various possibilities of access and public funding.

CURRICULAR CHANGES AND THE PROFILE OF THE TRAINING OF ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS: ARTICULATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIFIED HEALTH SYSTEM

Dentistry education, especially in recent decades, has undergone several changes to adapt the profile of graduates to the new social context, the current needs of the population and the opportunities of the job market. In Brazil, with the inclusion of Dentistry in the Family Health Program in 2000, curricular changes were made to promote the articulation of universities with the Unified Health System or SUS (San Martin *et al.*, 2018).

The graduation in Dentistry aims to train the dental surgeon to work in the integrality of health care, through the development of actions and services for the promotion, protection, recovery and maintenance of individual and collective health. It also reinforces interprofessional, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary action in health care, based on critical thinking, ethical values and scientific evidence; but with the north of welcoming and humanized care (Ferreira and Goés, 2023).

In the context of the above, Interprofessional Education (IPE) is an important pedagogical approach in health curricula because it seeks to prepare students for care in a collaborative team environment. Multi and pluriprofessional knowledge refers to the process in which there is a certain coordination between disciplines. Interprofessionality occurs when professionals learn from each other and about each other, and transprofessionality is placed as a higher stage, characterizing the fusion of certain fields of knowledge. Furthermore, the concept of teamwork is characterized as complementarity of practices, while collaboration has the sense of cooperation (ROSA *et al.*, 2022).

In order for IPE to ensure the strengthening of actions, particularly in the SUS, but in all areas



of professional activity, it is necessary for Dentistry to have a greater knowledge of other health specialties. A greater understanding of competencies enables the expansion of team actions. The road is still long, but it begins with the openness to Interdisciplinarity in the formation of the student.

The challenges are many and have intensified after the first wave of COVID-19 in Brazil; This has led to a lot of anxiety, a logic of condensing academic semesters, many online activities, and the loss of face-to-face experiences. Of one broadening the listening and understanding of the other. from clinical training to the development of practical skills.

There was a drop in students' academic performance during the pandemic. The students' lack of preparation for the remote model and the difficulties related to learning demonstrated that Emergency Remote Teaching was not enough to contemplate the range of skills to be developed during the professional training of the DC (Eich *et al.*, 2024).

FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many challenges in the training of students of the Dentistry Course in Public Universities in Brazil. And these include, from the financing and the correct application of the available resources, to an appreciation of the teacher. This appreciation is not only in their adequate remuneration, but also in the work environment that enables the actions linked to the full exercise of teaching. A teaching and learning process that empowers and boosts the personal and professional development of the students who embraced this course, reflecting not only on the excellence of the care provided to the population, but on the well-being and quality of life of all those involved.



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