

Dental education

Educating our young generation

Sir, I read with interest the recent letter¹ written by Dr R. Walpole on ‘unwanted sixth-formers’.

I am sorry to hear that you and your daughter have found it extremely challenging to obtain a clinical placement at a dental practice.

Applications to dental undergraduate programmes have always been a very competitive process. One should not only excel academically, but also show interest and commitment to dentistry as a future career. I would also like to congratulate your daughter in finally obtaining work experience at a dental practice after all the challenges she has been through.

I acknowledge that identifying a dental practice for work experience is neither an easy nor straight-forward process. When I was a general dental practitioner I had an average of two applications per year from sixth-formers applying for work experience.

I have always endeavoured to accommodate all these applications by negotiating with the staff at the dental practice. The student will usually observe for two to three weeks gaining work experience before application to their BDS programmes. To the best of my knowledge, most of them would eventually gain a place in reading dentistry. I strongly believe that the willingness to accept sixth-formers for work experience at dental practices is purely dependant on the individual clinician himself/herself.

We also routinely receive applications for work experience from students in secondary care settings in district general hospitals/dental hospitals. I regularly receive applications from year 12 and sixth form students requesting to attach to our department for work experience.

The process is often more complex in secondary care settings, where students are required to go through a formal application process. I am also aware about the availability of NHS online application where the students can apply to hospitals they wish to gain work

experience in once they obtain a ‘code’ from their schools.

On a positive note, I believe that most dental schools and district general hospitals are generally very receptive to students intending to gain work experience. I am sure there are still many keen, enthusiastic general dental practitioners out there who are willing to offer placements for work experience in general dental practices.

It is of utmost importance in educating our young generation to cultivate the seeds of interest in dentistry at an early stage. I would like to reassure you that there are still many enthusiastic, passionate dental educationists out there who are willing to contribute relentlessly to dental education. I sincerely hope that your daughter will be successful in the application of dentistry, and I look forward to working with her in the very near future.

J. Liew, by email

1. Walpole R. Dental education: Unwanted sixth formers. *Br Dent J* 2018; **224**: 916–917.

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