RESEARCH SUMMARY

Undergraduate placement in the PDS

The personal dental service as a setting for an undergraduate clinical programme **M. A. Lennon, R. S. Ireland, J. Tappin, P. M. Ratcliffe, I. Taylor, R Turner and A. M. Jenner** *Br Dent J* 2004; 196: 419-422

Objective

To investigate the feasibility and benefits of placing dental undergraduates into a general dental practice setting for part of their clinical programme.

Setting

Two six-surgery general dental practices in the North West of England operating within the personal dental service of the NHS.

Method

Six volunteer final year students worked within the practices for one-day-per week for 11 weeks. Evaluation included patients', practitioners' and students' views obtained from questionnaires and/or interviews and an analysis of students' clinical records.

Results

The students saw a large positive impact from: working alongside a dental nurse; developing their clinical skills; working in a busy practice environment; and developing interpersonal skills. Patients were very positive with 98% (44/45) being complimentary about the treatment they received, and commenting that they would be willing to participate in future student training programmes. The practice principals would also welcome continuation of the programme.

Conclusion

The programme was both feasible and educationally beneficial. The financial implications need further research.

IN BRIEF

- Personal dental service practices open up new opportunities as a setting for undergraduate teaching and learning.
- This paper evaluates a clinical programme in PDS for six final year dental students.
- Patients were very positive and raised no objections to paying customary NHS charges.
- Both practice staff and students were very positive about the experience.
- Further research is recommended on the costs of such programmes and on the availability of appropriate practices.

COMMENT

One of the most commonly heard complaints from new dental graduates is that they are ill-prepared for working in the general practice environment when they leave dental schools.

The introduction of mandatory vocational training in 1992 has gone some way to smoothing the path from undergraduate to general practitioner, but all parties have suspected for some time that a placement in primary care general practice during the latter part of the undergraduate course would be beneficial. Despite this widespread agreement, the financial, logistical and medico-legal difficulties inherent in the current GDS system make it almost impossible to develop such a scheme.

The paper shows that by moving away from the inherently rigid GDS to a more flexible PDS-type scheme makes it both feasible and beneficial to develop this type of undergraduate training. Indeed, it may also be helpful to bring more primary care practitioners into contact with undergraduates and to involve them more in an educational environment. With several dental schools now looking to reconfigure their services and develop more outreach teaching it may be that this scheme has taken the first steps in the path of developing a useable model.

The results show that all parties felt the experience had been beneficial and that some of the potential problems eg patients paying charges for work done by undergraduates, did not seem to cause any problem. The paper did not try to answer some of the more complicated financial questions which the authors indicate will need further work.

Following on from the implementation of the changes to primary care dentistry subsequent to the passage of the Health and Social Care Act, it is possible that it may become easier to develop more of this type of scheme.

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doi:10.1038/sj.bdj.4811136