

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Safe beginners: should the profession be concerned? – A response from the Dental Schools Council

Sir, David Westgarth's opinion piece¹ makes the lack of shared understanding of the purpose, expectations, and delivery of dental education all too clear. Misconceptions clearly exist regarding the meaning of 'safe beginner' – something highlighted by the GDC's own research – and the purpose of dental education. It seems, for example, that there is a common belief that the objective of dental education is to train NHS primary care dentists when the remit is actually much less prescriptive.

The first Local Dental Committee (LDC) motion cited in the article (North Yorkshire LDC) calls for more funding to develop education centres outside dental schools. The Dental Schools' Council (DSC) wholly support the motion that dental education is woefully underfunded with tariffs for training not acknowledging the actual cost of training. Many schools already deliver

training in community outreach clinics in areas of high need and deprivation, and additional funding to support further development in this area would be welcomed.

The second LDC motion asks that all schools be mandated to use generalists in all levels of training and assessment. DSC wishes to clarify that the vast majority of schools already recognise the skills and expertise of general dental practitioners (GDPs), and a substantial proportion of teaching is delivered by these professionals employed part-time. However, recruiting to these posts is becoming increasingly more challenging.

The third LDC motion calls for a review of the curriculum. DSC would like to reassure colleagues that this does not need to be of concern, given that it is already underway with representation from dental

foundation training educational supervisors.

Whilst DSC agrees with the motions raised, it would like to highlight the harm this type of article/opinion piece can do to our young colleagues emerging from dental school by undermining their confidence.

DSC would like to make it clear that we have the utmost confidence in our graduates and the valued contributions they will make to the field of dentistry, regardless of the path their careers should take.

Ultimately, we are all members of the same profession. We all work towards the same end goal. We must therefore support all colleagues, regardless of the stage they are at in their careers.

Dental Schools Council UK and Ireland

Reference

1. Westgarth D. Safe beginners: Should the profession be concerned?. *BDJ In Pract* 2022; **35**: 19.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A key issue for the dental team

Sir, I read with great interest the mental health themed issue of *BDJ in Practice*. As we live through the legacy of a global pandemic and the increased daily stresses for the dental team, this issue seemed most timely.

Whilst all of the articles had important messages for the team, the article on work-based stress¹, raised in my opinion key issues for the dental team moving forward:

'...to better understand a new generation of dentists and to adjust the dental health system accordingly, in order to offer working conditions that provide flexibility and enhance work/life balance with clearer progression pathways and a healthier practice environment – for now and in the future.'

From my perspective working in a dental school, I think key to supporting students and new graduates is embracing the concept of 'community of practice' where we do our utmost to support each other, no matter what stage you are on in the professional journey. Dental schools have in my opinion come a very long way since I graduated 30 years ago with regard to awareness of mental health,

and provision of a wide range of support mechanisms. My concern is what happens beyond the supportive environment of dental schools and dental foundation training, where support networks may be less clear cut, but the challenges in many respects greater. The below from a former Peninsula Dental School student, highlights this issue:

'I am very grateful to you and all the staff at Peninsula for equipping me with a mind-set to overcome adversity, to adapt, and succeed. I often vividly remember lectures you gave to us at Peninsula where you spoke of 'the first five years' and how it was going to be an important and challenging journey for each of us... Looking back, I feel I somewhat underestimated the insightfulness of your very wise words!'

The release of the *College of General Dentistry's Professional Framework – Career pathways in dentistry*², which corresponded with the mental health issue, seemed a timely coincidence. These pathways will hopefully allow the vast majority of colleagues who enter primary care a structured, supportive pathway, much as suggested in the *BDJ In Practice*

article. The professional framework has been developed with all team members in mind, moving through the professional journey from safe practitioner to accomplished practitioner. Perhaps crucially from a supportive perspective every certified member will receive support from a College Facilitator providing mentorship and guidance.

As the themed issue highlights, the pressures on the dental team seem to be greater than ever, and this structured well defined career pathway will help foster the community of practice, where we can work collectively to support each other.

E McColl, Plymouth, via email

References

1. Johnston, I. Mental health: Workplace related stress claims signal a profession under pressure. *BDJ In Pract* 2022; **35**: 14-15.
2. College of General Dentistry. Professional Framework – Career pathways in dentistry. Available online at: https://cgdent.uk/wp-content/uploads/securepdfs/2022/06/CGDent_Professional_Framework_Digital_Publication_low_res_spreads.pdf (Accessed July 2022).