The academization of dental hygiene: exploring the experiences of dental hygiene educators and leaders overseeing the transition to a degree programme

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Abstract

Dental hygiene is recognised as a healthcare profession playing an essential role in improving oral health care and reducing oral health inequalities around the world. Two aspects of this process of professionalization has been the transition from a vocational model of training to a standardization/harmonization of dental hygiene curricula and a move to full university accreditation. While scholarship has grown exploring the socio-demographic profile of dental hygiene students, their motivations for studying dental hygiene and their career aspirations, less is known about dental hygiene educators and managers perceptions of and experience with the academization of dental hygiene. This presentation documents the findings of an exploratory qualitative study with the staff of one DCP school in the UK who are currently transitioning from a vocational, two-year diploma course to a university affiliated three-year degree programme. It contemplates the following question: what gets lost, and what is gained in the transition from vocational knowledge to academic institutionalization? Findings will focus on changes to professional identity, organizational and pedagogic culture, as well as perceptions of change, control and loss. The overall aim of the invited talk is to encourage a timely conservation about the future of dental hygiene education and contribute to the ‘Learn’ theme of the conference. There is no funding for this project.

Learning outcomes

To outline the recent and current drivers of change shaping dental hygiene education

To document and critically examine the academization process experienced in dental hygiene education

To explore the views and experiences of dental hygiene educators and managers as they navigate the transition from a vocational to an academic programme.