

Pediatric Dentistry: Urgent Need for Developing Undergraduate Curriculum and Postgraduate Programs



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Pediatric dentistry is an age-defined discipline that provides preventive and therapeutic oral health care for infants and children through adolescence, including those with special health care needs.¹ Pediatric dentistry encompasses a variety of techniques, procedures, and skills that share a common basis with other specialties, but are modified and adapted to the unique requirements of infants, children and adolescents. Being an age-specific specialty, pediatric dentistry includes areas such as behavior guidance, care of the medically and developmentally compromised patients, supervision of oro-facial growth & development, caries prevention, dental treatment under sedation and hospital dentistry. These skills are applied to the needs of children throughout their ever-changing stages of development.

While the specialty of pediatric dentistry developed leaps and bounds globally during last century, it remained neglected in our country. Those responsible for public oral health in developed countries long realized that preventive and restorative services had to be initiated early in life if a real improvement in public oral health situation was the aim. They shared their vision with dental academia, resulting in strong undergraduate training and postgraduate programs in pediatric dentistry. Since then, Children's Dentistry has been taught as a separate major specialized subject in both developed and developing countries, including our neighboring countries. Unfortunately, the events in our country did not follow any science or reason. Pediatric dentistry was taught as one of four specialties under umbrella of conservative dentistry until recent past, mostly by those with no formal training in pediatric dentistry. Consequently, dental care of the children remained neglected or limited to temporary dental restorations or extractions.

The burden of dental disease among children kept pressing for better training in pediatric dentistry at undergraduate level.² Voices were continuously raised in this regard by pediatric dentists and community dentists working in the country.³ Thoughtful dentists from other specialties were very concerned about the situation. There

were concerns about international recognition of our dental degrees in other countries due to lack of training in pediatric dentistry and behavior sciences.

Great news has finally arrived. The Pakistan Medical Commission (previously Pakistan Medical & Dental Council) recently decided that pediatric dentistry would be taught as a separate major examinable subject in final year of BDS program. The news has been very well received, with few expressing concerns about lack of qualified faculty currently in the subject. A great majority, however, realizes that the subject of pediatric dentistry will also go through the same developmental curve as other major dental subjects went through in the past.

Almost all the academic dental institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa currently have at least one pediatric dentistry faculty member. Recruitment has already begun by academic dental institutions in the other provinces. A grace period of several years has been provided during which pediatric dentistry can still be taught by an allied dental specialty faculty members. Pakistan Academy of Pediatric Dentistry is offering its assistance to provide compact courses to the allied specialty faculty members, so that they can work on stopgap basis. Two postgraduate programs in pediatric dentistry are already successfully running in Peshawar and Islamabad. However, there is an urgent need for starting more programs. Leading health universities in the country, College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan along with Pakistan Medical Commission and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan have to work together, and ensure that adequate number of trained faculty members become available in pediatric dentistry for recruitment in future by academic dental institutions in the country. Similarly, earnest adjustments are needed in allocation of teaching hours to various subjects in undergraduate dental programs. It is so obvious that some subjects are being over-taught with unnecessary repetitions in several areas. However, it is heartening to note that some health sciences universities have already started working on adjusting their undergraduate teaching hours allocations. These universities have taken lead in this regards and would become role model for others in the country.

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appreciates these new developments, and offers its fullest support to all public and private health sciences universities and governmental organizations in assistance needed for development and improvement of undergraduate dental education in our country. The efforts of all those who for very long advocated for due status of Pediatric Dentistry are also greatly appreciated.

Astute training of our dental graduates in children's dentistry will have long lasting positive effects not any on dental health but also general health of our children, who are our greatest future resource and hope. Healthy bodies nurture healthy minds and in turn brighter overall future of our coming generations.⁴

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