

Community Dentistry or Dental Public Health to be Established As A Distinct Subject Specialty in Pakistan



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College of Physicians & Surgeons of Pakistan is the primary body that oversees the post graduate training and assessment of medical and dental specialists in Pakistan.¹ The dental specialties examination were established in year 1995, thus it's acceptable to believe that the academic dentistry is in its developmental stage in the country. Although, disciplines such as Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, Orthodontics, Operative Dentistry and Prosthodontics, have been fairly established as distinct subject specialties (evidenced by over 600 specialists trained in these subjects in last 25 years) but still there are some dental specialties that have lacked behind others. These include Periodontology, Dental Public Health and Pediatric Dentistry.

Periodontology is the latest addition in the list of recognized specialties at CPSP. This specialty got recognition as a distinct subject in year 2013.² Slowly and gradually, this discipline is gaining its momentum. Pediatric Dentistry and Dental Public Health (DPH) are yet to be declared as specialties by CPSP.³ Table 1 shows the comparison of Pakistani dental specialties with Indian counterparts and

Table 1: Dental Specialties in the India, Pakistan and United Kingdom

India (n=9)	Pakistan (n=5)	United Kingdom (n=9)
Orthodontics	Orthodontics	Orthodontics
Prosthodontics	Prosthodontics	Prosthodontics
Oral maxillofacial Surgery	Oral maxillofacial Surgery	Oral maxillofacial Surgery
Conservative Dentistry & Endodontics	Operative Dentistry Ψ	Endodontics
Periodontology	Periodontology	Periodontology
Pediatric & Preventive Dentistry	*	Pediatric Dentistry
Community Dentistry	*	Public Health Dentistry
Oral Radiology & Oral Medicine	X	Dental Radiology \ddagger
Oral Pathology & Oral Microbiology	X	Special Care Dentistry

n denotes number of dental specialties recognized in the country.
 Ψ still retains an obsolete name. A better name should be Operative Dentistry & Endodontics.

* Only MDS program exists, no FCPS program at present.

\ddagger No exit level examination at RCS presently exists.

X No programs exists.

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dental education and assessment system practiced in United Kingdom and Ireland.⁴

From teaching standpoint, there is an acute dearth of dentists trained in dental public health (DPH is also known as Community Dentistry). This makes it impossible for the dental institutions to find or retain suitable teachers in this discipline. The DPH specialists are the dentists who are expert in oral epidemiology, biostatistics, devising interventions that could improve the dental public health and overall quality of life of people. Thus, these DPH specialist could become the backbone of healthcare research in the dental institutions. Lack of competent teachers in DPH translates into poor understanding of research and lack of interest in the subject amongst dental graduates.

The subject of DPH warrants special attention. There are less than 10 major qualified dentists in this discipline in the entire country. Most of them are running MDS or MPhil programs in their respective institution. It's high time to bring these potential mentors into mainstream so that they could produce impact in the country's academic scene. It's sad to observe that in entire Karachi (seventh highly populated city in the world), there is just one DPH training center and that too has produced only a couple of graduates so far. All of this is because of DPH lacks the identity as a distinct specialty subject.

Following strategy could develop a justifiable resource of DPH teachers: First step is to document the actual count of subject experts in DPH and then incentivize them to serve as trainer for FCPS program in this discipline. Pakistan Association of Dental Research (PARA) should assist the CPSP to recognize DPH as a distinct post graduate specialty. Second step is to identify a few established dental faculty members (albeit of belonging to any specialty) who are already specialty-certified, research-active and presently teaching at a credible degree awarding institutions. Their research productivity should be evidenced by Medline indexed publications with an h-index 5 or more. Such faculty members should be offered an opportunity to progress their career in DPH.

If the above approach is implemented, it can be projected that within 10 years, an adequate number of DPH teachers and researchers will be generated for the dental academia.

This discipline will surely get parity with other specialties of dentistry. Not only the scarcity of DPH experts in Pakistan will be addressed but a new generation of dental investigators will be made available to the country as well.

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