

The importance of faculty and student international exchange programs



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Across the world, some dental schools feature a strong medical or scientific focus, while others place a heavier emphasis on clinical experience, or require different timelines to complete training. Despite these differences, there are many commonalities within dental education.

Today, dental schools and academic institutions, especially in the United States, are a melting pot of students and faculty members from all over the world who find common ground for clinical work, research, and educational activities. It is evident that access to knowledge is not evenly distributed around the world, but both learners and practitioners interested in furthering their knowledge can bridge the gap by obtaining timely and pertinent information from various resources, including the internet, journal manuscripts, and textbooks.

One thing that cannot be obtained from printed material or online resources is the very beneficial hands-on experience. Nothing can replace actual clinical experience or active participation in a research project. This is probably the major driving force behind the numerous international dentists' programs that have opened in the US in recent years.

Although it's not yet common, using platforms such as online webinars and even peer-reviewed journals to share clinical experience or new methods could be a step forward in creating a more dynamic, engaging experience. The use of simulators is probably the closest experience to a clinical hands-on activity, and could also be considered for online learning.

Student and faculty exchange between academic institutions from different parts of the world is currently the best way to share clinical experience and knowledge. It raises important questions like licensure and how comfortable the hosting institute is with allowing foreign dentists to have a hands-on experience. These questions can be addressed by careful evaluation of previous training, mentors' recommendations, and qualifying simulator tests.

Faculty and student exchange programs can also build worthwhile research and clinical collaboration, and help better our understanding of oral health challenges in other regions and populations.

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