

A Greater Uniformity in the Continuing Education Program of the European Community Dental Practitioner

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Dear Readers,

Man evolved by observing, learning from the environment and other humans, shaping his intellect, and being in a permanent war with anything and anyone who stood in the way of his decision to find his identity.

When we decided to be of use to those around us, and to help our fellow humans, in dealing with diverse medical-dental conditions, in particular, the “oral cavity”, we did it even though perhaps we did not wonder, as the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 BC-479 BC) did, about the “pleasure of studying and then practice what we had learned”. We are, however, in agreement with Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC), the Greek philosopher, who proclaimed, “Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work”.

We did find out much later from thinkers like Dr. Greene Vardiman Black (1836-1915) that: “The professional man has no right to be other than a perennial scholar”. With these ideals in mind, we strived to learn, improve, and practice as much as possible, before being able to offer our patients the best we could, while facing the realities of a “free labor market”.

The General Assembly of the Association for Dental Education in Europe, at its annual meeting held in Cardiff, in September 2004, approved “the profile and competences for the European Dentist”. The document would assist dental schools in Europe, to further harmonize and improve the quality of their curricula. Also, it established norms and regulations meant to describe the competency of the European dental professional: I Professionalism; II Interpersonal, Communication and Social Skills; III Knowledge Base, Information and Information literacy; IV Clinical Information Gathering; V Diagnosis and Treatment Planning; VI Therapy: Establishing and Maintaining Oral Health; VII Prevention and Health Promotion.

The Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE), through a group of dental educators, mainly from (ADEE), has been vigorously pursuing the objectives set out in the third phase of the DentEd III project (2004-2007). The plan was designed to facilitate convergence towards higher standards in dental education and professional training, and outlined to promote, through its working groups, the commonly agreed profile of the European Dentist. ADEE was best placed to implement in the European Union Member States:

- The development of an agreed approach on competences and curriculum structure.
- The development of an agreed approach to the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

In 2008, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), and the ADEA House of Delegates, established the general dentist as the primary oral health care provider nationally, and defined the areas of competence for the dental professional: 1. Critical Thinking; 2. Professionalism; 3. Communication and Interpersonal Skills; 4. Health Promotion; 5. Practice Management and Informatics; 6. Patient Care: A. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment Planning; B. Establishment and Maintenance of Oral Health.

To arrive at this profile during the learning and evaluation process in dental medicine, it was necessary to introduce first a problem-based learning (PBL) curriculum, and the “MEDICOL (Medicine and Dentistry Integrated Curriculum Online) system” was chosen as a standard. MEDICOL, a system used at The University of British Columbia, is a tool that provides

secure access to learning materials such as lecture notes, handouts, schedules, presentations, lecture recordings and videos.² Despite the young people's ability to use IT, and although it is increasingly used for practical training in universities, Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) and Computer Assisted Simulation (CAS) systems continue to be underutilized in dental education.³

As such, it stands to reason that Computer Assisted Learning, and Computer Assisted Simulation systems, could be successfully used in achieving a standardization of the "Continuing Education Program" in Dentistry, throughout the countries of the European Union.⁴

This proposal is supported by the fact that there are a number of preclinical and clinical disciplines such as: histology, dental materials, statistics, evidence-based dentistry, cariology, endodontics, periodontics, aesthetics, orthodontics, prosthodontics, occlusion, oral implantology and oral pathology, which use information technology already.

In the process of "continuing education" dentists with the right to free practice are mandated, continuously and throughout their professional activity, to follow the forms of continuous medical-dental education and to accumulate a minimum number of credits, established by the College of Dentists, in the country where they work. In the European Union, this annual minimum is variable from country to country (up to 200 credits in 5 years) and in US from state to state (from 15 to 72 credits a year).⁵ The lack of the minimum number of continuing medical-dental education credits would allow the Licensing Association to temporarily suspend the right of practice until the obligation established by the College of Dental Practitioners is fulfilled.

During this period, in a global and free society, we all have the opportunity to professionally improve our skills, in order to better serve our patients. In this effort, the use of information platforms has become essential, crucial and indispensable.

Established in 1993, the ADA Continuing Education Recognition Program (ADA CERP) provides ADA members and the dental community a mechanism to select quality continuing dental education (CE). In US, aside from the Universities, there is an entire list of other organizations, and approved dental providers, having also a role in the "continuing education process" providing lectures, webinars, conferences and seminars.

Starting with the 1st issue of 2017, more than 105,000 readers of the Stomatology Edu Journal, have gained free access to the first JADA CE Credits article. Licensed US, dentists can earn up to three (3) continuing education credits every month through the JADA Online Continuing Education Program. Although a great opportunity, the credits offered by ADA, are yet to be recognized in Europe.

The international economic crisis has highlighted the necessity for inter-state and inter-institutional co-ordination and cooperation, quick political decisions, unity and coherence of the EU. In order to ensure the quality of life of the European citizen, a greater coherence must be provided in the placement of the young practitioner in the competitive labor market, by ensuring and implementing, for the providers of continuous dental education, a common e-learning base at European level. There are a number of global actors, such as the World Dental Federation (FDI), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Federation of Dental Educators and Associations (IFDEA) which together with Regional Organizations, the European Regional Organization for FDI (ERO), the Council of European Dentists (CED), formerly the EU Dental Liaison Committee (EU DLC), the Federation of European Dental Competent Authorities and Regulators (FEDCAR), the Council of European Chief Dental Officers (CECDO), the Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) and the European Dental Students Association (EDSA), which have the capacity and competence, must find the availability, coherence and determination to enable the European dentist access to a common and unitary working tool, an e-learning platform, for continuous dental education.

Sincerely yours,

M-V Constantinescu

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DOI: 10.25241/stomaeduj.2017.4(2).edit.2

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