Graduate Outcomes of Dental Hygiene Baccalaureate Education

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INTRODUCTION

There is a scarcity of studies on Canadian baccalaureate dental hygienists. As discussions about baccalaureate education continue on a national level, examining outcomes of earning a dental hygiene degree is paramount.

According to the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) Job Market and Employment Survey,1 19% of dental hygienists practice with a bachelor’s degree as their highest credential. Only 6% have earned a bachelor’s degree specifically in dental hygiene.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the motivating reasons and graduate outcomes of the University of British Columbia (UBC) Bachelor of Dental Science in Dental Hygiene (BSDc) graduates.

METHODS

UBC dental hygiene entry-to-practice (ETP) and degree-completion (DC) graduates (n=116, 32%) from 1994 to 2016 participated in an online mixed-methods survey.

Survey questions explored:

- Personal satisfaction
- Increased knowledge base
- Increased employment opportunities
- Status/recognition of a degree
- Access to graduate education
- Improved critical thinking abilities
- Improved writing abilities
- Family/role influences
- Enhanced salary potential
- Enhanced self-confidence

Chi-squared tests were used to compare ETP and DC graduates and to compare these results to the CDHA survey.

Ethics approval was received from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H16-02221).

RESULTS

Primary reasons for pursuing the BSDc degree include:

- Improved knowledge base
- Increased employment opportunities
- Status/recognition of a degree
- Access to graduate education
- Improved critical thinking abilities
- Enhanced salary potential
- Enhanced self-confidence
- Improved writing abilities
- Family/role influences

ABILITY-BASED OUTCOMES

Differences between diploma and degree abilities are more closely linked with cognitive abilities rather than technical elements or clinical skills. Improved cognitive outcomes related to knowledge level, critical thinking, and evidence-based care.

“I feel more confident in researching and relating information to peers and patients. I have a better understanding of my facts and knowledge when discussing or debating issues with other health care collaborators.”

“Enhanced skills related to knowledge level, critical thinking and evidence-based care. The degree courses deepened and broadened my knowledge base beyond what I learned in my dental hygiene diploma, particularly courses related to policy analysis and research methods.”

PRACTICE OUTCOMES

- 75% of DC respondents indicated that the BSDc degree expanded their career opportunities
- 45% of all respondents work outside of the clinical practice setting

The results highlight the impact of baccalaureate education on dental hygiene practice.

CONCLUSION

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