



Woburn House, 20 Tavistock Square, LONDON, WC1H 9HD

Tel: +44 020 7419 5494 Fax: +44 020 7380 1482

Email: admin@dentalschoolscouncil.ac.uk

Statement on strengthening the NHS constitution

The Dental Schools Council (DSC) acts as the authoritative voice of all the dental schools within universities in the UK, the DSC provides a principal source for informed opinion and advice on all matters concerning dental education and research including relations between dental schools, medical schools, the National Health Service and other clinical care providers.

The DSC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on strengthening the NHS constitution. Those working in the NHS share a common purpose and a strengthened constitution helps to clarify the shared aim of working towards better care for patients and the public. This focus on the patient as an individual is something very much incorporated within dental education.

The role of education in realising the aims of the constitution

Entry onto a dentistry course is competitive and there are a number of stages to selection to study dentistry. In addition to academic achievement, candidates must demonstrate integrity and a commitment to, and understanding of, the profession. Dental schools act as 'gate keepers' and play an important part in ensuring the right candidates with the required aptitude to deliver patient focussed care are selected to study dentistry.

Furthermore, schools guide and support dental students in developing the skills and attributes, including professionalism, required to provide high-quality care to a diverse patient population. Consequently, education is at the very heart of ensuring the principles and responsibilities laid out in the strengthened NHS constitution can be achieved.

Making every contact count

One such responsibility is *making every contact count*, that each interaction with a healthcare professional should be used to support patients in improving their health. This is something integrated within the study of dentistry. A dental professional is trained in a wider health context to appreciate how oral health both affects, and is affected by, wider determinants of health and wellbeing; they are consequently in a strong position to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss wider health concerns and offer a range of advice relating to disease prevention and a healthy lifestyle.

The learning outcomes provided by the General Dental Council, which every dental school must adhere to, further reinforce the role of schools in supporting dentistry students to fulfil their responsibility to encourage patients to improve their health and wellbeing.¹ The learning outcomes highlight the need for dental students to absorb wider social trends and the determinants of health, along with the effects of health inequalities. Nevertheless, awareness of the wider health context and the effects on patients is only part of the responsibility on dental care professionals, it is also necessary for schools to develop communication skills in students so they are able to effectively communicate sensitively on personal subjects.

The strengthened NHS constitution positively reflects on the need for healthcare professionals to be focussed on individual patient care; however it is important to understand the role of education in both selecting appropriate candidates, while also working to develop their skills.

For further information, please contact Emily Burn, Policy Officer, Dental Schools Council at admin@dentalschoolscouncil.ac.uk

¹ GDC, *Preparing for practice: Dental team learning outcomes for registration* (2011)