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Dental Hygiene Education Position Statement

The British Columbia Dental Hygienists' Association (BCDHA) believes that dental hygienists graduating from entry-to-practice dental hygiene education programs should have completed a minimum of three academic years of post-secondary education in a recognized institution of higher learning, from an accredited dental hygiene program that meets the national dental hygiene learning outcomes and competencies; and prepares graduates for a full process of dental hygiene care using evidence-based decision-making principles.^{1,2,3}

Seven Components to the Position Statement:

1. ***BCDHA asserts there are minimum educational requirements to enter a diploma level dental hygiene program in British Columbia (BC).*** These are the first year pre-requisite, university level courses that all dental hygiene diploma programs in BC require prior to admission:
 - a. Human Anatomy and Physiology with labs (2 academic semesters)
 - b. Chemistry with labs (2 academic semesters)
 - c. English involving writing composition (2 academic semesters)
 - d. Psychology (2 academic semesters)
 - e. Introductory Statistics (1 academic semester)
 - f. Elective (1 academic semester)

The courses above must be fully articulated and transferable to dental hygiene diploma programs in BC in the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) and/or International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) transfer systems.^{4,5} The first year university transfer courses provide a sound foundation in the arts and sciences. This foundation is a vital aspect of dental hygiene education that allows students to build upon a 21st century body of evidence-based knowledge in dental hygiene theory and practice.

2. ***BCDHA asserts that dental hygiene education programs must be accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC).***

To be eligible for CDAC accreditation, a dental hygiene program must be offered in a post-secondary institution recognized by the Ministry of Advanced Education or

appropriate governmental agency, and meet or exceed education standards as determined by CDAC.^{1,6}

Accreditation is a non-governmental, peer reviewed process that measures education programs against predetermined national requirements; which are based on the Entry-To-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists.⁷ CDAC acts as a partner with the profession, educational institutions and health facilities to protect and further the public interest through the accreditation process.^{6,7,8,9,10}

BCDHA supports a national accreditation process that offers opportunities for transparency, public accountability, quality assurance, and improvement of dental hygiene education programs.^{6,7,8,9}

3. *BCDHA asserts that the dental hygiene curriculum must include the full process of dental hygiene care.*

The full process of dental hygiene care applies dental hygiene theory and practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, or community clients. The dental hygienist delivers professional services via a systematic process of assessing, diagnosing, planning, implementing and evaluating services rather than the provision of specific tasks.^{9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19}

4. *BCDHA asserts that dental hygiene curriculum includes evidence-based principles.*

BCDHA supports evidence-based decision making in dental hygiene education. Making decisions about client care (includes patient, population or community) is complex, and timely access to current relevant literature is crucial to the practice of evidence-based decision making.

Health care providers must stay current and safe with the latest advances in clinical science so they can provide the most effective and appropriate care. Internet technology plays an extremely important role in evidence-based care as the Internet has become the main means by which scientific information is disseminated from experts to the practitioners.^{20, 21,22}

Evidence-based education and practice will reflect research findings relevant to dental hygiene practice. The ability to assess levels of evidence and critique research assists providers in keeping current and helps to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. Information on how to find relevant evidence, evaluate its validity and apply the findings to practice must be provided in all dental hygiene academic programs.^{22,23,24,25,26}

5. *BCDHA asserts that dental hygiene education meets the current national competencies in the curriculum.*

BCDHA supports nationally agreed upon education competencies from the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, the Dental Hygiene Articulation Committee of BCCAT, and the CDHA Education and Research Advisory Committees. The National Dental Hygiene Certification Board of Canada and the CDAC evaluate candidates and programs against these competencies through the national board examination and the accreditation evaluation of educational programs.^{25, 26, 27,28,29, 30}

6. *BCDHA asserts that dental hygiene education programs must have curricula that allow for progression through to higher education.*

BCDHA recognizes the BCCAT because it supports the values and principles for dental hygiene students that enable articulation and transferability of education credit amongst institutions and access to higher education in the health sciences.

This enables dental hygienists to attain baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees in dental hygiene or other areas relating to oral healthcare.

7. *BCDHA supports the CDHA goal of ultimately requiring a degree for entry-to-practice for the dental hygiene profession.*

At the present time, CDHA supports all nationally accredited Canadian dental hygiene diploma programs and the four existing dental hygiene baccalaureate programs.^{28,29} The four schools offering the baccalaureate degree (in no specific order) are:

1. University of British Columbia
2. University of Alberta
3. University of Manitoba
4. Dalhousie University

BCDHA also supports degree level education for entry-to-practice when the degree is obtained post dental hygiene diploma. Examples of relevant fields of degrees may include; a degree in health sciences, or interdisciplinary care.

CDHA also recognizes that entry-level education must adapt to remain commensurate with preparation for entrance to an evolving health care system which demands greater independence, accountability and quality of services.^{29,30,31}

Recognizing future needs of the public, and of educational institutions, CDHA advocates for dental hygiene education in Canada to develop a more comprehensive academic system of baccalaureate and graduate dental hygiene programs.^{29,30}

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