Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on CODA-Accredited Dental Schools

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Abstract

COVID-19 is a virus spread from person to person through respiratory droplets. Dentistry is a particularly 'high risk' profession as the use of rotary drills and handpieces during regular dental procedures generate aerosols. Government mandates and health restrictions have limited the scope of dental practices, forcing providers to shift to emergency only care with the cessation of all elective and routine procedures. COVID-19 has further limited dental education as schools have a higher patient volume and facilities limit the ability to physically distance from others. Following university guidelines, many dental schools closed, shifting to only emergency care. Pre-doctoral candidates have been severely limited in opportunities to fulfill graduation and licensure requirements. The alterations to dental school curricula have not been consistent across all schools. The primary objective of this study is to observe and describe the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on dental school education and curricula. A survey was distributed to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at each of the 78 accredited dental schools in the U.S. and Canada. Participants were asked to react to nine statements using a 5-point Likert scale. Chi-square analyses and summary statistics were used to analyze Likert scale responses. This study utilized an online survey distributed to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at each of the 68 CODA accredited dental schools in the U.S. and Puerto Rico and the 10 in Canada. The survey consisted of nine statements and participants were asked to react to nine statements using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree). Chi square analyses and summary statistics were used to analyze Likert scale responses.

Methods

The results from the collected data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has largely affected dental school students and their planned curricula. Clinical and lab experiences have been the most impacted. Didactic learning has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and virtual learning has not reduced the quality of education received. The class of 2020 graduation was not consistently affected, but there is a stronger likelihood that the Class of 2021 graduation will be affected. The reduction in clinical and lab experience may explain why the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected the matriculation of residents into the schools’ specialty programs. Further investigation is warranted to understand how students, faculty, and dental schools will continue to serve patients and successfully complete graduation and licensure requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented barrier to dental school education. Associate Deans for Academic Affairs agree that COVID-19 has affected dental schools across the U.S. and Canada. Clinical and lab experiences have suffered, while the didactic experience has not suffered. 96% of Academic Deans strongly agree COVID-19 has affected their dental school.

Results

This study utilized an online survey distributed to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at each of the 68 CODA accredited dental schools in the U.S. and Puerto Rico and the 10 in Canada. The survey consisted of nine statements and participants were asked to react to nine statements using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree). Chi square analyses and summary statistics were used to analyze Likert scale responses.

1. COVID-19 has negatively affected your dental school.
2. COVID-19 affected the graduation time of the dental class of 2020.
3. If the COVID-19 pandemic continues through 2020-2021, the graduation of the class of 2021 will be affected.
4. COVID-19 has impacted the clinical experience that students receive.
5. COVID-19 has impacted the didactic experience that students receive.
6. COVID-19 has impacted the lab experience that students receive.
7. Virtual learning has impacted the level of education that students are receiving.
8. COVID-19 has affected the matriculation of residents into your school’s programs.
9. For students transitioning into clinic, the break affected continuity of education.

Conclusions

We would like to sincerely thank the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs of the dental schools who participated in our survey.

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Works Cited