

## Bridging Dentistry and Business: Preparing Undergraduates for the Realities of Practice.

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With the rapid increase in private dental colleges and the growing number of dental graduates, the profession is experiencing significant saturation across both clinical and academic fields.<sup>1</sup> Despite this expansion, undergraduate training continues to focus primarily on clinical competence and academia, while an equally important dimension—business and practice management—is often overlooked. As a result, many young dentists enter professional life unprepared for the practical realities of running a clinic. Challenges such as purchasing dental materials, negotiating with vendors, managing staff, handling finances, and maintaining budgets frequently contribute to the early downfall of new practices. Clinical excellence alone does not guarantee success; effective financial and managerial skills are equally essential. Even in basic sciences, faculty and laboratories face similar challenges in managing resources and equipment, underscoring the need for business acumen across all domains of dentistry. Therefore, integrating business education into undergraduate dental training is becoming increasingly important for preparing graduates to thrive in the realities of modern practice.<sup>2</sup>

While the need for business education in dentistry is undeniable, its inclusion in undergraduate training comes with both advantages and challenges. On the positive side, such training can better prepare students for future professional endeavors, enabling them to manage time, finances, and resources effectively. Early exposure to business principles can protect young graduates from financial losses, reduce the stress of running a clinical setup or laboratory, and help them cope with the economic pressures that often contribute to anxiety and burnout.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in an increasingly saturated job market, business acumen allows dental graduates to explore diverse career pathways beyond traditional academia or clinical practice.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the already demanding curriculum and clinical rotations place significant pressure on students, and the addition of another subject may risk overwhelming them. Implementing a structured business module would also require careful planning, curriculum redesign, and allocation of resources, all of which may initially face resistance from institutions faculty and put pressure on the students. Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits of producing well-rounded dental professionals suggest that a balanced and phased integration of business education is worth pursuing. In today's evolving dental landscape, success is no longer defined by clinical expertise alone—especially considering

the uncertainty witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Hospital jobs were at risk due to reduced patient flow, and private clinics faced sudden financial setbacks that few were prepared for, largely because business and financial management were never part of our formal training. To be better equipped for such challenges in the future, dentists must combine technical skills with sound business judgment. While introducing business education into an already demanding undergraduate curriculum may present challenges, the benefits of providing future dentists with financial literacy, management skills, and entrepreneurial insight far outweigh the drawbacks. A carefully designed and gradually implemented approach can ensure that students are not overburdened, while still preparing them for the multifaceted realities of practice. Ultimately, bridging dentistry and business is not merely an academic addition—it is a crucial step toward empowering graduates to build sustainable careers, deliver better patient care, and adapt confidently to the changing dynamics of the profession.

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