



REVISITING ADMISSION CRITERIA TO DENTAL SCHOOLS IN INDIA- PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

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Abstract: Reforms in dental education in India is an ongoing debate. One of the most important aspect of dental education is admissions process. We have been following the decades old practice of using only scores in the admission test to allow seat selection. Dentistry consists of a repertoire of diverse skills which prospective students are unaware of until they enroll. One test is not sufficient to gauge their suitability to the course. A dental student is expected to be skilled (dexterous), communicate effectively, be empathic among the many requisite traits. Without these, an optimum practice of dentistry is questionable. This paper discusses the admissions process of India and some countries around the world. We have also provided recommendations for admission process into dental schools in India.

Keywords: Dental admission, Indian dental schools, dental undergraduate admission, reforms, dental education, eligibility criteria

MeSH terms: School admission criteria, Dental education

Introduction: One of the greatest expectations of society from health professions is provision of care by competent

professionals. The onus of fulfilling this expectation lies with medical schools and universities, which are regulated by the monitoring councils as well as state and central governments. A lot of factors, both cognitive and non-cognitive decide the competency of a person in his profession. From the many factors that are responsible for creating a competent dentist, student selection plays an important role. Admission criteria play a vital role in shaping a prospective health professionals' ambition/career and his image in the society. The aim of this paper is to review the admission process to dental schools in India and discuss recommendations for admissions in India. There is literature that talks of the preparedness for practice for the dental graduates under six Domains namely Academic and technical competence (domain 1), Communication and Interpersonal skills (domain 2), Protective mechanisms and adaptive skills (domain 3), Professional attitude and ethical judgment (domain 4), Clinical entrepreneurship and financial solvency skills (domain 5) and Social and community orientation (domain 6). There is so much of expectation from a fresh graduate but the entry in this field is based on only one criterion which is only 17% of the total expected criteria.^[1]

Selection assessment represents a critical



component of successful education in the skills, knowledge, affective processes, and professional values which somehow greatly goes missing in the current scenario especially in India.

Dentistry is a skill based profession that relies heavily on manual dexterity. Many branches of dentistry and most of basic dental care protocol requires refined and controlled movements of hand and fingers with allowance of error margins being in fractions of a millimetre.

Therefore, the authors feel that dentistry must have a separate dental admission test or there should be a provision for additional tests if one wants to pursue dentistry. This aim of this paper is to discuss admission criteria to dental courses in India and abroad and to provide recommendations for revising admission criteria.

A logical analysis of current scenario and review of current literature has shown that there is a need for change because of

- Current admission process fails to serve the science and society
- No processes to test non cognitive attributes
- No means to identify students who will be skilled professionals and teachers
- No means to check personality and trait of student ^[4,5]

Therefore, the validity of current admission test in India becomes questionable and needs a revision.

Current status in India: At present the admissions to both medical and dental schools in India are based on the results of a common nationwide entrance test, National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG) being conducted by National testing Agency (NTA), an independent autonomous

testing organization established by Ministry of Human Resource development (MHRD), Government of India (GOI). NEET is a selected response question-based examination in the subjects of Physics, Chemistry and Biology with questions covering the syllabus of classes 11 and 12 as prescribed by Central Board of Secondary Education or other equivalent examination boards in country. It is conducted on one day over the entire country at designated test centers.^[2] Students are allotted seats in colleges at a merit cum choice basis through a centralized counseling which is being conducted online in most of the Indian states by various government authorities.

Training in health sciences is vast and rigorous, resulting in a highly specialized workforce after long period of dedicated study. Literature has also reported that dental students have a lot of preconceived notions and ideas about dentistry and they have no idea about rigor and requirements of the course, prospects, and dexterity required. It has been a general observation that majority of students enroll in dentistry after they fail to secure a seat in medicine (MBBS) or due to family pressure. Parental influence plays a great role in career decisions in India which consequently has a great possibility of negatively affecting student performance.^[3]

The medium of instruction prescribed for medicine and dentistry in India is English and so is the availability of the books and journals. India is a vast country with various regional languages. Majority of the schools provide schooling in local languages. Students from non-English medium of schooling and those with poor English proficiency may find it difficult to cope with a sudden change in language of instruction. While a few overcome it,



others struggle for the entire duration of course. The NTA gives an option to take the NEET in other Indian languages. Though, it can be argued that language shouldn't be a barrier in a country like India and aspiring students from non-English medium of instruction can't be denied admission, a test of basic English is should made mandatory. Translating all prescribed textbooks to regional languages does not seem to be a feasible option.

In health sciences the diagnosis of the disease and decision on a management plan relies on reasoning and logical assimilation of data in hand and one's acquired knowledge. Hence a person's aptitude and logical analytic capabilities need to be of higher standard to acquire a certain level of competency. Students' attitude and concern towards patient care and empathy cannot be gauged by testing proficiency in an entrance exam that only consists of questions from syllabus of class 12. It is also not known whether students coming from alternative education background such as homeschooled children or students from International Baccalaureate curricula are able to enter into dental education or not. Also a personal interview and statement of purpose helps to gauge student's interest and will help in eliminating forced entries.

Revising entry requirement^[2, 4-10]: The consequences of admission to health sciences school are educational, economic, and social. Being a health professional is a responsible job because the well-being of human society depends on their competence.

Admission criteria in other developed and developing countries have more than one admission requirements and this is not just limited to scores in the 12th grade or the admission test scores. Admission criteria

in many other countries look for proficiency in English, personality tests, spatial awareness, eyesight requirements.^{13,14} Some countries also require the completion of a Bachelors program with specific credit hours in biology, physics and chemistry, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, quantitative reasoning and personal interviews for entry into an undergraduate dental program.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Centralised counselling and seat allotment is not found in many countries. Students apply to desired colleges along with their prerequisites and admission test scores.

Additional non-academic requirements such as satisfactory criminal conviction disclosure, occupational health clearance, scholastic activities, community activities, achievements in the field of sports, first aid, shadow experience are also considered, are required. There is also provision for admitting home schooled students in many countries.^[23,24]

Interviews should be conducted for invited applications and are conducted in the form of Multiple Mini Interviews. Areas covered in MMIs are Communication skills, exploring general social and ethical issues, normally health related. The interviewee's general suitability for the program and as a health professional is considered. The admission process begins at least one year before the date of commencement of the academic term.

We have observed that many countries have more stringent entry requirements compared to India and most of them check for proficiency in English or in the language which is going to be the medium of instruction. Further, many of them also look for student's personality, aptitude and their career interest. However, we also find that none of them has delved into exploring



the possibility of determining dexterity as an entry requirement to dentistry.

It is now necessary for us to introduce reforms in admissions process. Admissions process needs to take a big leap from current norms and change the admission system for dental undergraduates and subsequently postgraduates. Relying on Class 12 scores or an entrance test based on class 12 syllabus alone is not sufficient to determine eligibility to enter dental school. Currently students have very little time to contemplate on career choices after class 12 because the concept of taking a year's time to prepare for admissions does not seem acceptable. It is the societal mindset. There may be a progressive few who do take this step. Also, students

should have some baseline knowledge of dentistry before making a life changing career decision.

Conclusion: Serving the society as a health professional is a huge responsibility. We cannot base eligibility to this huge responsibility based on one test, the contents of which is determined by the NCERT.

Reforms in admission criteria are overdue. We are in need of evidence based; vision driven reforms. The admissions process must be made transparent and accountable. The purpose of this reform is to serve the needs of the society, identify truly motivated individuals to pursue dentistry and to encourage representation from all sections of the society.

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