

Dental conferences: Are they good for education?

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Abstract

The current status of dental education in India has some pivotal challenges. There is a vital need to concentrate beyond the humdrum classroom learning and curriculum which can be partly addressed by sharing ideas with experts and community. There is a need to refine and reconstruct the current education pattern to create pioneers in the field of dentistry for meeting the expanding demands. Dental students in India are trained to excel theoretically, but there seems to be a vacuum between the theoretical and its clinical implications. Dental conferences endow with a variety of approaches and strategies related to management and quality improvement of dental clinic as well as explore new ideas and concepts. The aim of this article is to discuss the benefits associated with attending conferences as well as highlighting the scope for improvement of conduction of such conferences.

Keywords: conferences, dental education

India is poised to be a leader in the global economy in this century. It has a population of over more than 1.3 billion which will challenge both the medical and oral health care systems. The current status of dental education in India has some pivotal challenges that need to be refined and remade to be able to create pioneers in the field of dentistry to address these expanding needs.¹

Dental students in India are trained to excel theoretically, but there seems to be gap between what is learned and what is applied in the clinics. In the real world, when dealing with patients, problem-solving skills and practical knowledge are necessary. Some of the changes that might bring dental education to the next level in India could include selecting highly motivated students for dentistry, modifying the teaching methodology with some importance given to treatment planning, and introducing research into the curriculum. Changing the current attitude of the faculty, students, and the general population towards dental education is another factor important in the successful transformation.

‘Sharpen the saw’ idea certainly pre-dates to Stephen Covey who listed it as his seventh habit of highly effective people. The idea behind it is that sometimes you have to take a break from your routine work to sharpen your skills. Dr. A Senthil Kumaran rightly says, A dull axe won’t cut a tree nearly as effectively as a sharp one.²

A conference facilitates you with new ideas and approaches that make you more effective and efficient at work. The idea is that the dental education in India should look beyond the curriculum and not just focus on the classroom, laboratory and clinical teaching.

A conference is a meeting of people who "confer" about a topic. It is often confused with a convention, colloquia or symposium. A colloquium is the simple informal way of addressing/interacting with audience within an academic environment. A symposium takes place in an academic setting and is type of a formal meet and it covers only a single topic. Symposium can be decribed as a smaller scale conference. A conference is a meeting that has been preset and

involves discussion on a variety of topics by the delegates. Generally values of conference differ with respect to the sphere of their occurrence.³

Shashikiran ND (2015) found that conferences which are conducted by dental education society are a remarkable feature of the academic, professional, and social life.⁴ Dental conferences in India are held at various levels; international, national, state and regional level. A large conference of an international or national level will have a larger number of delegates from various places and with wider scientific knowledge.

The main advantages of attending conference are that they provide special forum to the researchers wherein they can communicate with scientists from diversified fields. They offer the platform to the researchers to establish or to extend their scientific network. Professors and Associate professors have priority to chair a session of his/her interest.⁵

The benefits of attending conferences are⁵:

1.Sharpen your skills⁵: Learn new ideas and approaches to make you more effective and efficient at work.

2.Meet experts and influencers face-to-face⁵: Conferences offer the opportunity to meet the pioneers and to position yourself as an expert in your field.

3.Learn in a new space⁵: Sitting in the same chair, in the same office or in the same environment, can keep you away from fresh thinking and new ideas..

4.Network⁵: Good conferences offer the opportunity for you to mix and mingle, form new relationships and strengthen existing ones.

5.Explore new ways of working⁵: Get hands-on information that is specific to your subject of interest, directly from the experts. A well run conference will help you curate and cultivate new ideas to help improve your approach. Although there is lot information on the web, conferences will cut through the clutter to deliver the best content specific to your field.

6.Break out of your comfort zone⁵: Conferences force you to break out of your comfort zone. Breaking out of your comfort zone is just the type of action that is necessary to break out of old ways of thinking.

7.Get greater focus⁵: The flip side of learning new things is re-learning classic techniques. Conferences create opportunities for greater focus and reflection that could help you take your expertise to the next level.

8.Absorb the energy of like-minded individuals⁵: There is nothing like being in a room of like-minded people who want to “better” themselves.. Take time out for other people who are willing to take time away to learn something new.

9. Get access to pre-conference workshops⁵: Pre-conference workshops offer even more learning opportunities that connect attendees in an intimate learning environment. These workshops are particularly designed according to the conference themes and are a great build-up to the main conference.

10. Invest in yourself⁵: A day out of the daily routine to sharpen your skills, is investing in yourself. It is admitting that you are worth it, that you still have things to learn and that you can get better. It is an investment in yourself, your career and your future.

11. Have fun⁵: Conferences add a layer of enjoyment to managing your career growth by mixing a social aspect into your learning.

12. Grow⁵: Conferences provide a unique convergence of networking, learning and fun into a single package. A good conference forces you to grow and challenge yourself.

Dental conferences endow with a variety of approaches and strategies related to management and quality improvement of dental clinic as well as explore new ideas and concepts on a global level and the various themes include Aesthetic dentistry, Local and general Anesthesia, Dental Management of special children and medically compromised patients, Marketing of dental materials, Conservative dentistry and Endodontics, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, , Oral Pathology, Oral Medicine and radiology, Laser in Dentistry, Oral Implantology, Orthodontics and dentofacial orthopaedics, Pediatric and preventive Dentistry, Periodontology, Prosthodontics and maxillofacial prosthesis, Medical emergencies in dental practice, Dental Ethics, Oral Hygiene, Cone beam computed tomography, Smile designing.⁶

Reasons for attending such conferences can be many: to gain credit points, to learn new things and get updated, to meet other expert dentists, to participate in and present research papers and posters, to enhance debate skills, to attend trade fairs, to visit that particular place, for recreation and to meet new people.⁴ The current dental curriculum and the new updated regulations of the Dental Council of India has stated that the trainees shall be encouraged to attend conferences and also to present atleast two scientific papers and posters at state or national level specialty and allied conferences/conventions during the training period.⁷

There are problems associated with conferences such as: 1)The registration expense; 2) The travelling expense which can be high sometime; 3) The expenses of accommodation which are high due to the large number of participants travel needed to attend a conference. Such conferences required to be cost-effective for everybody including students. It should be worth the price in terms of the knowledge gained, the techniques learnt, the guest lectures, the registration kit and the food.

Organizing a research conference can be quite the challenge. Some might even advise you not to do it. But it's also an amazing opportunity and a rewarding experience. Putting together a

successful event doesn't have to be an uphill struggle. You just have to remember three golden rules: plan ahead, surround yourself with a great team, and know why you are doing it. But sometimes the hassles and hurdles are unavoidable.⁸

Are dental conferences dinosaurs bound to become extinct in near future? Conferences will vanish if dentist stop paying attention to them, if they do not value them, and if they do not attend them; and of course, if funders do not fund them.⁹

As per modern practices dental conferences seem to have a grim future and only time will tell if they will form a renaissance period in dentistry or stand the ultimate test of time. Conferences are excellent means to share and display ideas but they might go out of fashion like everything else in this fast paced world that we have created. Disregarding its utilitarian advantages, the lack of such conferences will leave us void of an effective means to discuss novel ideas.

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