

EDITORIAL

GHANAIAN PATIENTS' EXPECTATIONS FOR ORAL HEALTH CARE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The practice of clinical dentistry in Ghana has undergone tremendous changes in the last 50 years. Most of the dental surgeons were trained in the UK and the first dental surgeons to practice were employed by the MOH in the early 1940's. The dentist-population ratio was increased by about 10 dental surgeons per decade up to about 1970. This situation was clearly unsatisfactory for the dental health needs of Ghana. By the close of the last century the dentist population ratio of about 1:200,000 was definitely not satisfactory. In that period both personnel and equipment have also seen some improvement. In 1952 the government of the first Republic set up the Maude Commission which examined the training of the Medical and Dental professionals. They recommended that for the best possible results government should make resources available for the local training of doctors and dentists. This is why the Ghana Medical School was established by the Nkrumah government in 1962. The starting of a dental faculty was therefore really a matter of time.

The training of dental surgeons in Ghana was started at Korle-Bu in 1974. The students did their basic sciences at UGMS and their clinical training in Lagos and Manchester University Dental Schools. Localisation of entire course in Ghana began in 1992 when the first batch of five pioneer dental students started their clinical training at Korle-Bu. A new building with modern equipment has been installed and the expectations of the population for oral health in Ghana is positive and very high. Patient satisfaction is the key to successful dental practice and with the development in health care delivery, it is necessary to understand the nature of the patients demands. Gone are the days when all a patient demanded from the dental profession was "just take it out". The patient now has high expectations and demands that the profession delivers the best treatment with the aid of the most recent technology.

Five trends have been described in the USA which affect the patient's expectations and demands for dental care.

These trends are:

- The change in age and diversity of patient demographics.
- The change in patients oral disease patterns.
- The increase in general public awareness regarding oral health care.
- That patients are becoming more knowledgeable about modern dental services.
- That patients are becoming more aggressive in holding healthcare providers accountable for the quality of care.

To be able to assess all these trends we need to research and to publish our research findings. The stage is set for confluence of trends as we head into the 21st Century. We now have new technologies for early diagnosis and therapy of dental diseases.

A more sophisticated patient population is expected to be more aggressive in its expectations of dental care providers. Patients therefore expect effectiveness of the services provided. The dental profession of the 21st Century may be held more accountable for patients care than ever before. As the science base moves forward and technological advances are made, patient's expectations of the dental profession will rise. The dental surgery of the future will build on these technological advances to improve the delivery of dental care.

The Internet is stimulating these trends as patients are directly accessing information on new dental care technologies and treatment methods. Thus the dental professionals will be held more accountable for quality of their dental care and for the skills with which to communicate diagnosis and treatment needs than ever before. Patient expectations and demands for oral health care therefore will be far greater in the 21st Century than they were during the 20th Century. Technological advances will continue to provide innovations for dental care delivery for many years to come. Dentistry will be challenged by this combination of technological advances and patient demands. The 21st Century will offer many new and exciting opportunities for dental professionals to improve the oral health of the public.

The Dental Profession in Ghana has in the past utilized facilities offered by the Ghana Medical Journal. It is therefore very encouraging that this new Journal should have its birth at this point in time so that through its pages the profession will seek answers to the many problems for oral health in Ghana. I wish the journal well and pray that success will crown its efforts.

REFERENCE

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