Strengthening Indigenous Cultural Competence Curricula in Dentistry Higher Education: Student Perspectives

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**INDIGENOUS** peoples generally enjoyed better health in 1788 than most people living in Europe.

Prior to 1788, Indigenous people were able to define their own sense of being through control over all aspects of their lives, including ceremonies, spiritual practices, medicine, social relationships, management of land, law, and economic activities.

**COLONISATION** of Australia resulted in many Aboriginal peoples being dispossessed and physically ill-treated causing social disruption, population decline, economic exploitation, discrimination and cultural devastation.

Aboriginal Australians continue to experience considerably poorer health as well as social and economic outcomes compared to non-Aboriginal Australians.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE, HAVE YOUR SAY & HELP CLOSE THE GAP!**
Why is Indigenous cultural competence important?

- Indigenous populations carry the greatest burden of disease
- Cultural competence is fundamental to health care and life quality
- Traditional dental curricula focus on surgical care
- Australian Dental Council mandatory accreditation requirements
Survey & Interviews with University of Sydney Students

Purposive Sampling: Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) and Bachelor Oral Health (BOH) Faculty of Dentistry Students

Online Survey
Quantitative analysis using integrated REDCap survey tools
Open-ended questions coded to common responses

In-depth Interviews
Audio Recording, Professional Transcription, NVivo 11

Qualitative Thematic Analysis (Smith 2004, Glaser & Strauss 1967)
Summary of Student Survey Results

- Indigenous content currently included in curriculum?
  - Substantial Amount 8%
  - Limited Content 68%
  - None 22%
  - Don’t know 2%

- How is Indigenous curriculum offered?
  - Separate Course 3%
  - Orientation 6%
  - Integrated into Units of Study 50%
  - Other 41%

- Methods used for teaching Indigenous curriculum?
  - *Lectures 75%*
  - Case Studies 14%
  - Group Discussion 9%
  - PBL 9%
  - Reflective Writing 9%

- Issues explore in Indigenous curriculum delivery?
  - *Health Outcomes 72%*
  - History & Culture 30%
  - Racism 25%
  - Colonisation 18%

*Multiple answers allowed*
Student in-depth interview participants and emerging themes

- 15 dental faculty students participated in interviews:
  - 10 students were from the DMD program
  - 5 students were from the BOH program

- Following analysis of the data, five key themes emerged:
  - Defining Indigenous Cultural Competence
  - Barriers to incorporating Indigenous curriculum
  - Indigenous Curriculum Content
  - Indigenous Curriculum Strategies
  - Cohort Considerations
Theme 1 - Defining Indigenous Cultural Competence

- Understanding of Indigenous culture, beliefs, values and history
- Awareness of Indigenous culture and history
- Acknowledge differences in Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture
- Communicate with Indigenous peoples
- Respect, sensitivity and engagement with Indigenous peoples

“….understanding of Indigenous culture, understanding the differences of their cultural beliefs and practices and be able to integrate that into your care, personalise it based on their cultural or religious beliefs….”

BOH Student
Theme 2 - Barriers to incorporating Indigenous curriculum

- Jam packed curriculum
- Lack of understanding or ignorance
- Students being focused on procedures
- Not having Indigenous staff teaching within the faculty

“Personally at the beginning I wasn’t interested either, I thought oh it’s just another lecture but once I learned a little bit more when I had that one gentleman come in and, he told us about everything. He informed us of all the problems that the Indigenous are faced with I didn’t realise that it’s a little bit more important than I thought it would be”

DMD Student
Theme 3 – Current Indigenous Curriculum Content

- Limited Indigenous curriculum
- Disease focused Indigenous health curriculum
- More social and community aspects of health are required

“We focus so much on dentistry, about the theory, the knowledge that we don’t really take into consideration as much as I would hope…. the other populations around us”

DMD Student
Theme 4 - Indigenous cultural competence curriculum strategies

- Indigenous guest speaker to present historical and cultural content
- Indigenous staff and students within the faculty
- Engagement with Indigenous communities
- Indigenous cultural exhibitions or museums

“I think a face to face workshop or field trip actually would be more realistic in a way because I think a lot of the Indigenous culture actually involves a lot more than just learning the history, learning the traditions but rather to participate in their ceremonies, in their story times and talking to elders to learn actually what’s specific to their community”

DMD Student
Theme 5 - Cohort considerations for incorporating Indigenous cultural competence in curriculum

- Current mix of cultures within the cohorts
- High proportion of overseas dentistry students
- Similarities between Indigenous cultures throughout the world

“It could be a community outreach event, anything that will help us understand what’s going on because although I don’t live in Australia, I’m a temporary resident, I would love to know about them. I’d love to know what more there is because they’re clearly a big part of Australia so I had to figure it out on my own”

DMD Student
What can we learn from dental schools around the world?

- Few dental students believed that their education prepared them sufficiently to treat patients from different cultural backgrounds (Novak 2004, Smith 2006, Hewlett 2007, Wagner 2008)

- Students need to appreciate the viewpoints of culturally diverse peoples, be able to identify various health determinants, and be accomplished in communicating with many cultures (Cross 1989, Pilcher 2008, Rubin 2008)
What can we learn from dental schools around the world?

- Student participating in field trips to underserved communities experienced professional, cultural and societal transformation (Bimstein 2008, Gunderson 2012, Doucette 2015)

- Increasing cultural diversity among student cohorts increases students cultural competence (Arnett 2012, Hewlett 2009)

- Reflective writing was a key curriculum strategy in developing students cultural competency in higher education settings (Isaac 2015, Victoroff 2013)
Indigenous cultural competence at the University of Sydney

- Wingara Mura Indigenous Strategy

- National Centre for Cultural Competence (NCCC)
  - 5 Online Modules
  - Cultural Competence Leadership Program (CCLP)

- Integrating Indigenous cultural competence into curricula using a combination of didactic training, reflection and community engagement, as well as achieving a diverse student cohort, would provide opportunities for increasing cultural competence knowledge and skills of dentistry and oral health students (Forsyth 2017)
Thank You

Supervisors

- Dr John Gilroy
- Professor Stephanie D. Short
- Dr Michelle Irving
- Winthrop Professor Marc Tennant

Cultural Competence Curriculum Review Reference Group

- Boe Rambaldini: Director Poche Centre for Indigenous Health
- Linda Lewis: Aboriginal Otitis Media Coordinator
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- Prof Chris Peck: Dean of Dental Faculty
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