



Welcome to the Profession of Dentistry-A Briefing for I BDS Students

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Abstract

Fresh professional college students have many doubts on how to study, how to learn skills and how to interact with others. Most of the doubts are addressed in this article.

Keywords: Professional; Learning Styles; Skills Learning; Behaviour; Confidence

Let us congratulate you for opting a professional course like Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) which has immense potential in the modern world. Giving relief to the pain and offering comfort to our own people is a great opportunity. I would like to give you a brief introduction to the BDS course and a method by which you can successfully complete it.

You have joined a professional course and you would like to know the meaning of the term 'professional'. The term professional refers to anyone who earns a living by performing an activity that requires education which will make one knowledgeable and will help to acquire specific skills related to the profession. Because of the training, a professional receives, he can make his job appear very easy for others. A professional knows his job very well and can take appropriate decisions at the right time. Dental professional is one who learns the science of dentistry in content and application and practices the same for a long period of time for the benefit of the society.

While joining the course many students feel that they have to get the degree at the earliest. At the end of the learning period definitely you will get the degree but the most important achievement should be the related knowledge, mastery of skills and a pleasing behavioral pattern befitting to a health professional.

Right temperament to be a dentist

You have excellent academic scores and that is why you could get a seat for the course leading to the dental profession. Do you have the right temperament to be a dentist? A few questions are asked to you to find out that important aspect:

- Do you enjoy interacting with and helping people?
- Would you like a career that offers challenge and variety?
- Would you enjoy being self-employed?
- Are you interested in helping people maintain and improve their oral health?
- Do you have good manual dexterity and spatial judgement?
- Do you have keen memory and a strong scientific acumen?

If your answer is 'Yes' to all these questions, no doubt you are fit to be a dentist. If the answer for a few questions is not in the affirmative, do not get panic; the teachers will help you to be a good dentist by giving special attention by modifying the programme.

The method of teaching

In olden times teachers used to force feed the students and the main concern was in teaching. Teachers felt satisfied that they

could complete the classes within the specified period of time. Now the concern has shifted from teaching to learning. In the colleges, students are facilitated to learn the required skills and the training is modified accordingly. Albert Einstein stated on the methods of educating children like this; "I do not teach my children but I create conditions for them to learn".

The subjects

BDS course extends for a period of four years of subject study and one year of internship. More than 30 subjects are covered during this programme. The core subjects are the following:

- Dental Public Health
- Conservative Dentistry/Endodontics
- Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology
- Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
- Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
- Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics
- Pediatric Dentistry
- Periodontics
- Prosthodontics/Dental Materials Science.

Students are subjected to a stringent evaluation process consisting of class tests and examinations conducted by the university.

How do we learn

In Mahabharata Udyogaparva, there is a statement about learning which is as follows:

आचार्यात्पादमादत्ते, पादं शषियःस्वमेधया।

पादं सब्रह्मचारभियो, पादं कालक्रमेण च।।

AchAryAt pAdam Adatte pAdaM shishhyas-sva-medhayA /

pAdaM sa-brahma-chAribhyaH pAdaM kAla-krameNa ca //

One fourth from the teacher; one fourth from own intelligence,

One fourth from classmates, and one fourth only with time [1].

It is important to have a good teacher. But the failure of a student to learn is not totally teacher's fault. This also means having the best teacher doesn't guarantee success! The teacher can provide an atmosphere where curiosity is aroused, and information is made available.

One of the success factors is one's own intelligence - capacity, aptitude or ability. There is no substitute for the power of brain;

be it knowledge, action or devotion. No one else can pray for your health, you need to learn hygiene and have a good daily routine. No one else can make you win a match, without your own practice. Students either study alone, or they rely so much on group study. Self-study is needed to internalize the concepts and practice.

Only the wise knows that there is no substitute for the time that is spent in gathering experience. This is what makes theory into practice; in other words, bookish knowledge turns into practical wisdom. Once a consultant engineer was called to repair a factory that was down. He came, he saw, he tightened a screw and charged Rs.1000. The floor manager was furious - how can you charge Rs.1000 for tightening one screw? The engineer replied - Re.1 for tightening the screw and Rs.999 for the experience to know which one to tighten.

The present-day student is blessed with many resources to acquire knowledge other than teachers. In the past century professional colleges had good libraries equipped with books and journals. Internet search facilities have made the searching process much easier and the student should master the search strategy but the only word of caution is that the student should verify the authenticity. Both theory and practical classes can be had from internet which can reinforce the student's learning.

Learning style

Human beings learn mainly by seeing and listening. It is estimated that nearly 94% of learning happens through these two routes. Smell, touch and taste also help in providing learning experience. In other words, learning happens through the five sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. Every student is not learning the same way. Some students can easily learn by reading a book or by listening to a lecture. Some students can easily grasp the subject through practical sessions. Mental status can influence the learning capability. While some students can learn very well in a calm state of mind but some are triggered by the stress associated with examinations. Possibly this is the reason some students rush through the notes just before entering the examination hall. Some students get the learned feeling while attending the class, only if they scribble in a note book. If the teacher is trusted by the student, he learns fast and copies whatever the teacher tells or does without any doubt. If you find out your learning style, the speed of learning can be improved.

The most widely accepted model of learning styles is called the VARK model, which stands for visual, aural/auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic (Figure 1). In brief:



Figure 1: Learning styles. <https://www.uow.edu.au/student/learning-co-op/effective-studying/identify-your-learning-style/>.

- Visual (spacial) learners learn best by seeing
- Auditory (aural) learners learn best by hearing
- Reading/writing learners learn best by reading and writing
- Kinesthetic (physical) learners learn best by moving and doing [2].

How to study

After the regular classes in the college, you come home or to the hostel and study. This study session helps to systematically reinforce what is learned in the class. During this time, students are able to create connections and make the information they have learned more meaningful. Home study sessions should be done regularly in a place. Changing the study place quite frequently may affect the effectiveness of your learning. An hourlong study session should have one or two breaks of three minutes. But during the breaks do not ever indulge in ‘WhatsApp’ through mobile phone. During the break you can stroll inside the room, recollect what you have learned or drink water. Try to avoid TV and Radio during the study because they serve as distracters to learning. You need not make your seating too comfortable. A wooden table and chair, a table lamp, fan and a book shelf can be considered as appropriate facilities required for a student.

When to study

There is no one “best” time of day to study. Each one has his/her most productive time of the day, when one has the most energy.

Some people are morning people, who wake up with lots of energy. Others are night owls, and have more energy in the evening hours.

Just like each student has a unique learning style, different students may learn better at different times of the day. When you reach the professional college, you might have understood the most favoured time.

The benefits of early morning studies can be - refreshed and energized mind after a good night’s sleep which makes it easier to focus on what is being learned and absorb the information more effectively. Benefits of studying during the night are - peaceful and quiet, fewer distractions, clearer mind for creative thinking and sleeping after studying can consolidate information and improve recall. Minimum five hours have to be allocated for home study for five days a week [3].

How do we learn skills?

Dentist is primarily a surgeon and hence he has to acquire professional skills primarily. A medical professional should communicate well not only with patients but also with colleagues, superiors, teachers and public.

Professional skills are taught by teachers with utmost care. First the teacher demonstrates and the student is asked to observe it. Then the student is asked to imitate what he has observed under the supervision of the teacher. Student will be asked to repeat the same skill many times till he gets proficiency. A proficient student will be allowed to attend on the patient without supervision (Figure 2).

Many of the skills are not practised first on the patient but on simulators (phantom heads). Simulators have artificial teeth which can be prepared as on natural teeth. To gain manual dexterity this type of training is very useful. Simulators have started using robotics, virtual reality and haptics. Students get near natural feeling during the training and transition to real patients will not cause any difficulty. Each speciality in dentistry has identified the specific skills to be practised by the students and a quota of repetitions is also fixed. The teacher aims at making the student proficient in all the skills related to dentistry so that he can face the patient with confidence.

Communicate with strangers

Facial expressions (Smile)

Without a doubt, the most common-and telling-nonverbal means of communication is through facial expressions. Human



Figure 2: Learning skills. <http://gidagkp.org/imgzen.aspx?cid=5&zpen=learning+to+ride+a+bicycle&xi=3&xc=19>.

faces are able to make more than 10,000 different expressions, and each one articulates volumes of information with ease. Smiling, frowning, blinking, and eye-rolling are the strongest and most relatable expressions, but even the smallest eyebrow twitch or nostril flare can be read with minimal effort. The most accepted way to establish a connection with a stranger or a patient is to Smile! A smile is welcoming, warm, and establishes you as a person who people want to spend time with (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Smile can win people. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/599752875347170026/>.

Open posture

Posture is critical in making a strong impression. How you stand or sit is one of the important elements in how you are perceived by others. Someone who stands with their back straight and head held high exudes confidence, assurance, and strength, while, conversely, someone who is slouched or facing the floor demonstrates uncertainty, indifference, or even weakness. To express friendliness and positivity, maintain an open posture. Stand with your legs, hip-distance apart and keep the torso exposed and not covered with the crossed arms. Keep the head raised and maintain a relaxed facial expression. A closed posture, especially crossed arms across the chest, gives the impression of boredom or hostility (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Open and closed posture. <https://ayltai.medium.com/8-body-language-hacks-for-job-interviews-6547cab716dc>.

Look like you are listening (Forward lean)

If you want patients to speak, don't multi-task while they do! Avoid the temptation to check the text messages. Instead, focus on them while speaking by turning your head and torso and face them directly. Leaning forward is another nonverbal way to show that you are paying attention. It's important to listen to people - it's just as important to make sure that they know you are listening.

Touch

Touch has important communicative functions but it is generally a neglected modality. Touch plays an important role in emotional communication, attachment, bonding, compliance, reassurance, intimacy, and liking. Child patients and senior citizens find it highly reassuring if the doctor gently touches. Touch however should not embarrass the patients because of the existing social considerations.

Eye contact

Perhaps the best way to build rapport with a new patient is to maintain eye contact. Eyes can indicate interest, attention, and involvement, while failing to make eye contact may be interpreted as disinterested, inattentive or rude. However, this doesn't mean you have to stare directly into the face of another person which may become counterproductive. There is nothing more aggressive than staring intensely into someone's eyes. It is suggested that healthy eye contact consists of looking semi-randomly at the area around the eyes and mouth.

Nod

We instinctively nod our head for several reasons. Most people nod their head while listening and is an indication of attending the conversation and understanding. Nodding does not necessarily mean agreement. Most of us believe that to nod our head up and down is a signal of agreement but it is not always true especially in women [4].

Positive attitude

Positive attitude is a state of mind that envisions and expects favourable results. This attitude helps you see the good in people. It is a mindset that uses the words, "I can", and "it is possible". People who possess this attitude are easier to get along with, are happy, and they spread joy around them.

A person with a positive state of mind does not dwell on the problems and difficulties of the past and does not let those dictate his or her life. Such a person would rather learn from the past mistakes and move on. People with a positive outlook, view life, challenges and the situations they go through, with confidence and are sure they can deal with them.

These people would not be stuck in a negative attitude of fear, lack of self-esteem and passivity. People with a positive attitude will not let failure or obstacles stand in their way, and will always try to find ways to overcome them. When negative thoughts dominate your mind, you do not seek solutions and progress. You just see the negative and expect it. This affects your thinking and your actions, and unconsciously, makes you fall for bad choices.

Allen Klein, an American businessman said "Your attitude is like a box of crayons that colour your world. Constantly colour your picture grey, and your picture will always be bleak. Try adding some bright colours to the picture by including humour, and your picture begins to brighten up".

Individuals who have a positive attitude will pay attention to the good, rather than bad in people, situations and events. A simple example of a positive attitude; when you are having a very bad run of luck but you still say "Good Morning" rather than "What's so good about this morning" [5].

Good behaviour

The way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others is designated as behaviour. A person with good behaviour shows respect towards feelings and sentiments of others and shows equal regard to everyone. Modesty, humbleness, kindness, and courtesy are the essential traits of a well-behaving person. A well-behaved person never feels proud or arrogant and always takes care of the feelings of others. People with polite and pleasant nature are always popular and respected by a large number of people. In short good behavior is what people in a society expect from others.

Time management

Time is equal for all. For every one a day has only 24 hours. When you join for the course, you know that periodic tests and assignments will be there and at the end of the year an exam will be conducted. A calendar has to be planned and periodically evaluate the progress. You should be able to prioritize the events according to importance. You should know that examination is more important than a cricket match. There is always enough time for important things otherwise learn how to make time for doing important things.

Maintain and develop a list of specific things to be done each day, set your priorities and the get the most important ones done as soon in the day as you can. Evaluate your progress at the end of the day briefly (Figure 5).

TV, internet, computers and mobiles take away your time which you may not be aware because the habit is so addictive. Friends take away your time by making frequent visits to your room. They may ask for some help which may over burden your schedule and takes away the time. For the sake of friends, you will be postponing many important things of your academic programme. If it is an emergency do not hesitate to offer help. Learn to identify over commitment as a time robber. Though time is equal for all, you can obtain more time by reducing the sleep time. Catch yourself when you are involved in unproductive projects and stop as soon as you can. Concentrate on one thing at a time; multitasking may sound fashionable but may not be successful. If you are in doubt, ask for advice without hesitation.

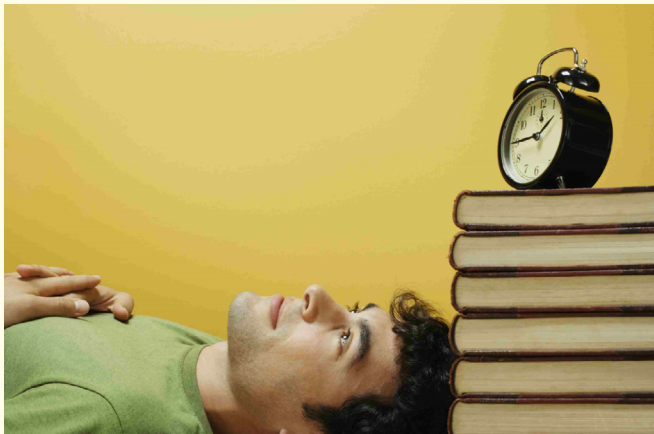


Figure 5: Time management is important for students. <https://www.verywellmind.com/time-management-for-psychology-students-2794801>.

If time is managed well, it will be manifested as promptness. You will not be late for classes, examination, submitting assignments, meeting friends and for taking rest [6].

Self confidence

Self-confidence is an attitude about your skills and abilities. It means you accept and trust yourself and have a sense of control in your life. You know your strengths and weaknesses and have a positive view of yourself. You set realistic expectations and goals, communicate assertively, and can handle criticism.

Confidence means feeling sure of yourself and your abilities - not in an arrogant way, but in a realistic, secure way. Confidence isn't about feeling superior to others. It's a quiet inner knowledge about your capabilities and you feel secure rather than insecure. When you are confident, you will enthusiastically try new things. You will try to perform in a better way rather than brooding over your incapability. Confidence enhances your ability to bounce back from challenges and adversities. To improve self-confidence, you should dress neatly and groom decently. Always think positively and feel good. Be good and your confidence level will definitely improve (Figure 6).

Five values of student-life

काक चेष्टा, बको ध्यानं, स्वान नदिरा तथैव च ।

अल्पहारी, गृहत्यागी, वदियार्थी पंच लक्षणं ॥

Kak chesta, bako dhyanam, shwan nidra tathaiva cha.

Alphari, grih tyagi, vidyarthi panch lakshanam".

Five values are described in our ancient literature:

- Perseverance of a crow: Efforts should be similar to a crow as described in the story of crow trying to drink water from a pot by placing pieces of stones to raise the water level.
- Concentration of a crane: Focus on the work like a crane which stands still silently to catch fish.
- Light sleeper like a dog: Take alert naps like a dog that can identify known or unknown visitors even in his nap and guards the house.
- Light eater: Student should eat less because excessive food brings lethargy, sleep and tiredness.
- Ready to stay away from home: Stay away from sweet home, meaning away from the comfort zone [7].

Conclusion

Life of student is a great opportunity which we get only once. Utilise the studentship with great care and dedication. Let me close this with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr [8]:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper

he should sweep street even as Michelangelo

painted or Beethoven composed music or

Shakespeare wrote dramas. He should sweep

street so well that all the hosts of heaven

and earth will pause to say, here lived a great

street sweeper who did his job well".

-Martin Luther King Jr

Getting admitted to the health profession is a great chance, not all the people get it. Once getting admitted a student's duty is to utilise it to its full potential.

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