



Researchers who understand the clinic, and clinicians who are familiar with research

Several years ago, in a series of editorials, we discussed the association between dentistry and medicine, the role dentistry plays in health systems, and the association of our profession with research universities.¹⁻⁵

In most countries, dentistry is considered a branch of medicine or a health-related profession, and taught in academic institutions, normally in separate faculties. The level of interaction with medicine and other health professions varies between universities. Dental schools also differ in the level of basic sciences their students are exposed to. These distinctions normally emerge from variations in the duration of the studies (4 to 6 years), the teaching philosophy of the particular institute, and the institute the dental school is affiliated with.

The associations between oral health and overall health have been documented extensively. This includes the role of oral health status in diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, preterm birth, and even Alzheimer disease. It is important to note that the studies reporting these associations were performed mainly by dental practitioners. To maintain this trend and to generate more knowledge, we need more scientists who understand the clinics and more clinicians who are familiar with the research process and methods.

For almost a decade, I have had the privilege to lead the Eastman Institute for Oral Health at the University of Rochester. The institute is located within a large medical center and is part of a prominent research university. This allows efficient interaction with other health professions as well as with scientists from various disciplines.

To address the abovementioned need for more dental scientists, we encourage junior faculty to allocate 50% of their time to research and 50% to clinical work and teaching. Each faculty member has a mentor, and within several years a decision is made on the track the faculty will choose. If they decide to focus on a clinical track they will become clinicians who understand research methods and needs, while those who choose a research track will become researchers who understand better the clinical needs. Needless to say, some faculty choose to continue doing both, performing research and pro-

viding care in a varied time allocation. It would have been difficult to develop such a program in an institute that was not affiliated to a research university.

The change in patients' demographics related to the increased life expectancy of patients suffering from chronic illnesses, cancer survivorship, and those with special needs, requires closer collaboration with other health care professions. As a result, dental practitioners must have a more profound education and training in general medicine; this will require curricular adjustments in the dental school and also better equipped facilities and easy access to high-level medical care. Treatment of these groups of patients may also require a different approach that should be studied by researchers who are familiar with the clinical needs.

Excellent oral health-related research can be performed by dedicated faculty in any institution. However, based on recent trends in medical and dental fields, the ideal dental school should be associated with both medical centers and research universities. We need more clinicians who understand research and more researchers who are familiar with clinical needs.

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