



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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FROM PRECLINIC TO PROFESSIONAL—MENTORING DENTAL HYGIENE STUDENTS

Wallace State Community College's dental hygiene program has developed a mentoring process that enhances student learning and facilitates a smooth transition from preclinic to clinic and from clinic to professional career. Mentoring encourages guidance and wisdom from second-year students to first-year students, continues throughout the curriculum, and includes five components.

Faculty-Led Advisory Group Meetings

Upon acceptance into the program, all first-year students are assigned a "big sister." Second-year students are an integral part of this process, as each is allowed to select her "little sister." The second-year student feels more connected to her first-year little sister as a result of being included in the selection process. The students are assigned to advisory groups, each led by a faculty member. Each group, consisting of approximately six second-year students and their little sisters, meets twice each semester.

Patient chart review is an example of an activity performed at these meetings. A patient chart for each second-year student is selected randomly for review of completeness by a fellow classmate. The little sisters observe this process while the big sisters teach them about the patient charts, such as how to write up treatment plans and progress notes, what signatures to obtain from faculty, and how charts are put together. The objective is to familiarize the first-year student with patient charts and clinic procedures prior to treating clinic patients.

Preclinical Procedures Clinical Observation Project

In the first semester of the program, the first-year students learn how to perform basic assessment procedures in preclinic. The first-year students are required to make an appointment with their big sisters

and observe them during a patient-assessment session in clinic, observe specific procedures, and write a paper—objectives are to compare the performance of the procedures in clinic with the instructional strategies in preclinic. This gives first-year students the opportunity to see procedures put into practice on an actual patient. Since the inception of this process, faculty has observed much less confusion and apprehension when the first-year students enter clinic and provide treatment to patients.

"Big Sis Cleaning Day"

At the beginning of the second year in the program, first-year students perform a complete patient-treatment sequence on their big sisters, prior to treating clinic patients. The second-year student advises and encourages her little sister through every procedure, even going so far as to instruct about what faculty "count off for" in clinic. This process has alleviated anxiety and answered a multitude of questions before first-year students start treating patients. The learning that occurs during this assignment is tremendous.

Clinic IV Peer Evaluations

In their final semester, second-year students are required to perform a peer evaluation on their little sisters. The second-year student observes the first-year student during a patient-assessment session, evaluates the student's assessment technique and patient-management skills, and shares her evaluation.

Early on, faculty were concerned that second-year students would hesitate about being honest in their evaluations. This assumption has proven to be incorrect! The second-year students have been very constructive in their evaluations. An unanticipated benefit has been enhanced self-assessment by second-year students. Therefore, ample learning opportunities are available for all students.

Theory V Graduate Mentorship Project

The final piece of the continuous mentorship process occurs in the final semester of the program. The second-year students are required to visit three offices in which



graduates of the program are employed. The objective is to help students link their educational experiences to real-life expectations in the workplace. Students are required to observe graduates' performance in job responsibilities, interoffice relationships, innovative technology, and patient-management skills. Second-year students are required to write a reflective paper that summarizes their observations.

Conclusion

Mentoring clearly demonstrates the positive outcomes of a student-centered philosophy. The end result is student learning at a deeper level. The mentoring process has created more well-rounded, confident, competent, professional graduates who are outstanding representatives of the dental hygiene program and our college.

Barbara Adams, *Program Director, Dental Hygiene and Dental Assisting*

For further information, contact the author at Wallace State Community College, 801 Main St. Hanceville, AL 35077. Email: barbara.adams@wallacestate.edu