

## Revamp, Re-energize, Readjust the Current Dental Education

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*“Education is not filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire”*

*William Butler Yeats*

Dental education produces competent professionals catering to the needs of the patients with evidence based therapy and cutting edge treatment technology. In our country, dental education has remained unchanged over decades, with its traditional teaching, inflexible curriculum and skill gap between graduates and real time world expectations. The major cause being that “Surgeons of tomorrow are taught by teachers of today using curriculum of yesterday”. Only way to address this gap is to upgrade the dental education curriculum along with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first Indian education policy of the 21st century, introduced after 34 years to keep pace with the fourth industrial revolution. In India the Eleventh Five Year Plan improved education and was based on recommendation from the National Knowledge Commission and Yashpal Committee. This plan introduced initiatives that led to significant changes in undergraduate education. The need of the hour is a transformation in curriculum, teaching method and clinical exposure with emphasis on critical thinking for multidisciplinary research, innovations, flexibility in course selection, credit weightage and evaluation format.

Development of holistic curriculum and its implementation remain to be important components of an academic program. Today's course content needs to be more inclusive and flexible. Courses like Advanced digital dentistry, Communication skills, Ethics and Medico-legal training are essential to keep the students updated with expanding scientific and real time knowledge. The course content should have horizontal as well as vertical integration. Autonomy for framing the course content should rest in the hands of the institution and its faculty. Faculty also needs to undergo specialized training as high-quality online course content creators. The delivery of the course is to be through effective teaching strategies and outcomes to be assessed via innovative assessment methods.

The teacher centric traditional teaching method must be replaced by innovative models that focus on practical learning and student centric approaches. Emphasis is on good communication, healthy group discussion, debate, problem solving, self-directed learning and pedagogy. These approaches are in pace with 4 principles of learning viz. Learning any where, Learning anytime, Personalized learning and Student centric learning. It also accomplishes 4C's of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning viz. Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking and Creativity. Especially in dentistry, there exists a need for experiential learning and this should be made more effective with digital simulators. Multiple digital learning platforms enriched by experts in varied fields are available, such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, etc. which can be accessed by students and faculty. The student will have academic flexibility to choose elective courses for which they will be rewarded with credit, stored in their Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). This will promote the concept of Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). The ultimate goal remains lifelong learning for students as well as faculty and ABC will keep a comprehensive account of this learning credit.

NEP 2020 proposes moving away from proficiency in single subject to Multidisciplinary Education and Research University (MERU). All students should have a knowledge of modern medicine (allopathy) along with traditional medicine (AYUSH). It not only acknowledges the rich diversity of medical practices but also recognizes the potential synergies that can arise from their integration. This integration can lead to a more holistic understanding of healthcare and provide patients with a wider range of treatment options. The interdisciplinary component can be integrated into dental sciences through research. Research-driven education not only enhances students' understanding of the subject matter but also fosters critical thinking, creativity and innovation. These skills are crucial not only in the field of healthcare but also in various other domains.

As the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, universities should make provisions for education to be at par globally which will empower learners to understand global issues and become active promoters of better oral and overall health. Hence, there is a need to promote India as a global study destination for international students and create collaboration opportunities with universities abroad for facilitating and strengthening student exchange program.

Overall, integrating the principles of NEP 2020 into dental education can lead to a more dynamic and responsive system that produces competent professionals capable of meeting the diverse needs of patients and staying abreast of advancements in dental care.

*“Change is the end result of all true learning”.*