

Homelessness on the curriculum?

Sir, we read with interest the letter by A Mohan 229, 213(2020) regarding the need to make community volunteering with people experiencing homelessness an essential part of dental training. We fully agree that education institutions have an important role in developing the next generation of dental professionals to be "socially accountable" so that they have a greater appreciation of the needs of vulnerable groups.

In addition to American models there are examples of "service learning projects" across the UK and our own institution has run a suite of modules for over ten years working directly with disadvantaged groups in the community, including organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness. The benefits are numerous for the students and patients alike and have been reported in an editorial¹ in this journal and by the students' themselves².

A project developed by our undergraduate students has led to the establishment of a dedicated dental service for people experiencing homelessness at Peninsula Dental School and its social enterprise partner – Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise CIC. The model has demonstrated an effective approach that can improve access to care in a way that is acceptable to patients and to dental professionals³ and is an active part of the dental curriculum. Integrating homelessness in the dental curriculum can bring about positive changes in the way dental health professionals work with vulnerable groups in the community. The treatment provided can in turn act as catalyst for change in multiple areas of a patient's life³.

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References

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2. Webb L, Sandhu S, Morton L, Witton R, Withers L, Worle C, Paisi M. A dental student view on learning gained through Inter-Professional Engagement with people experiencing homelessness. *Education for Primary Care* 2019 15, 1-3

3. Paisi M, Baines R, Worle C, Withers L, Witton R. Evaluation of a community dental clinic providing care to people experiencing homelessness: A mixed methods approach. *Health Expectations* 2020 doi: 10.1111/hex.13111