

Mentoring for the Future

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The number of applicants to dental schools across North America has risen dramatically over the past several years. It seems that attracting bright young minds into our profession is easier than ever. But, this type of increase was seen in the 1970's and then dropped off significantly in the following decades. We must not assume that the future of the applicant pool for our programs will continue to enjoy the large numbers that seem to have contributed to the opening of multiple new schools. Our work at stimulating interest in our profession within the young people we meet must not cease. I thank Dr. Keene for providing what follows.

(Jeffrey A. Platt, Editor)

Sparking an interest in dentistry as a profession can come early in a student's life, perhaps even while as a young patient sitting in your dental chair. The Pre-Dental Program for undergraduates at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH takes that 'sparking' one step further.

Several years ago, as a local dentist, retired private practitioner and member of the Dartmouth Medical school staff, I was asked to assume the responsibilities of meeting with Dartmouth students interested in dentistry. The result was a comprehensive mentoring program for students at the college. Each term, programs are organized with upper class members. Students meet over home cooked dinners or at the college to hear local practicing dentists share their journey into the profession and answer student questions. During the past 6 years the students have had the opportunity to speak with

dental school admissions officers, dental clinical faculty and dental school deans.

There is a mentoring process at Dartmouth that has been an effective pre-orientation for the students as they transition to dental school. They have had the opportunity to shadow local dentists in their dental offices and work at a local free dental clinic. Dental school programs where students can have a week or two immersed in the dental school setting with hands on opportunities to 'feel' what dentistry is like has been a big help to those who have attended. The only programs that have been widely known to us have been the UMD New Jersey Gateway Program and one at UCLA.

Through the American Academy of Gold Foil Operators, the American Board of Operative Dentistry, the Academy of Operative Dentistry and the American Academy of Restorative Dentistry, networking has been made possible with the clinical faculty at various dental schools in the US and Canada. These associations have been invaluable resources for helping students seek out good dental schools. They also learn the kind of questions that they could be asking during their interviews when seeking admission to dental schools.

Practicing or retired dentists who live or work near colleges can offer their assistance to guide future dentists - giving them opportunities to learn, gain experience through shadowing in local dental offices, and be inspired. The thrill of being able to inspire excitement and interest in dentistry is a great feeling.

Questions regarding starting a mentoring program can be directed via email to: dmdsmile@gmail.com