

Geriatric Dentistry Education Programs in Spain

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Over the past few decades, the world has experienced a gradual increase in the percentage of elderly people aged 65 years and over. The Spanish population, like the rest of the Western world has not been left behind. As of January 1, 2011, the National Institute of Statistics in Spain put the elderly population at 7.8 million (17.2%) out of a total population of 47.1 million people.

The United Nations Population division predicts that by the year 2050, the elderly population in Spain will be 35.7% of the total population, meaning one out of every three Spaniards would be aged 65 or over. As this elderly population increases, evidence suggests that their demand for dental services will also increase.

A cross sectional study of 19 dental schools in Spain, using a simple, 12-item questionnaire, information was collected regarding the geriatric dental education programs from the official websites of all the schools.

Data obtained from the school websites revealed that only 42% (n=8) of schools offered a specific geriatric dentistry

course, seven of which are public, and the other one is private. No school had a separate Department for geriatric dentistry or a head of the geriatric program. Of the eight schools, six (75.0%) offered the geriatric course as a mandatory requirement.

The increasing population of the elderly population in Spain has underlined the need for the dental profession to take particular attention to the oral health needs of older patients. Many older people have complex systemic health problems sometimes due to physiologic changes, and dentists should be well prepared to provide care for these patients. Dental graduates should be able to interpret the aging process, common medical conditions, sociologic, psychosocial factors and their impact on oral health.

More studies on the curriculum content, design, implementation and evaluation of geriatric dentistry programs at the undergraduate level should be developed. Research must also focus on assessing the access and improvement to the oral care of the elderly population. Dental schools, organizations, local and state governments need to work together, using a multidisciplinary approach, in responding to the unmet needs of the elderly population.