

Crafting the Future of Dental Education: Navigating the Nuances of Speaker Selection

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Prof NH Wood, Managing Editor, SADJ - BChD, DipOdont(MFP), MDent(OMP), FCD(SA), PhD

In the dynamic field of dentistry, the pursuit of continuous education is paramount, impacting clinical practice and patient care profoundly. This commitment to lifelong learning ensures that dental professionals remain at the forefront of technological advancements, research breakthroughs and evolving clinical practices. The foundation of professional excellence in dentistry is significantly influenced by the continuous updating of knowledge through education, emphasising the need for a curriculum that supports comprehensive patient care models and integrates basic science with clinical relevance.¹

The selection of speakers who convey critical, evidence-based information becomes a crucial task, bearing the responsibility not only of disseminating cutting-edge knowledge but also of maintaining the integrity of the content delivered and, by extension, the organisations represented. In an era characterised by the rapid exchange of information, the potential for the propagation of unverified or detrimental practices necessitates a stringent vetting process for educators. This ensures that only those with the most accurate and safe practices are given the platform to influence the next generation of dental practitioners.

A survey by Du Preez, Basson and Wolmarans² underscores the importance of continuing education courses attended by dental practitioners, noting the preference for courses in operative dentistry, aesthetic dentistry and fixed prosthodontics at the time. Since then interests and needs of dental practitioners have changed. This reflects the diverse interests within the dental community and the need for a broad spectrum of expert speakers to cater to these varied educational needs. Furthermore, the evolving landscape of dental education indicates a shift towards a more comprehensive approach in dental treatment planning and continuing education in general dentistry. This approach emphasises the importance of not only specialised knowledge but also a holistic understanding of dental practice.³

In this editorial, we delve into some of these critical considerations and touch on the rigorous criteria and thoughtful processes behind the selection of educators. The significance of this selection process cannot be overstated, as it directly influences the future of dentistry – a future that must be built on solid evidence-based practices and a steadfast commitment to patient care. This exploration serves not only as a guide for curating educational content but also as a reminder of the profound impact that knowledge dissemination has on the professional growth of dental practitioners and the health and safety of the patients they serve.

The importance of esteemed speakers in dental education

The significance of esteemed speakers in dental education extends far beyond the mere delivery of content; their expertise and experience serve as a beacon, guiding the enhancement of dental practice standards and fostering a culture of excellence. Esteemed speakers, with their depth of knowledge and insight

into both the science and the art of dentistry, play a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of dental knowledge, encouraging a culture of curiosity, critical thinking and continuous improvement among practitioners and students alike. The direct correlation between the calibre of speakers and the enhancement of dental practice standards is well documented. The growing pressure on dental education and practice for quality assurance and improvement highlights the essential role of dental professionals in maintaining and enhancing the quality of oral healthcare. The incorporation of quality assurance and improvement tools in dentistry underscores the necessity for speakers who are not only experts in their fields but also adept in the ethical implementation of these practices.⁴ Kamalkanthan and Kanthan (2020)⁵ elaborate on the concept of healthcare quality within dental offices, illustrating how dental practitioners can integrate quality improvement measures into their practice. This study underscores the importance of continuous education and self-assessment in fostering a world-class quality practice in dentistry, again pointing to the crucial role of knowledgeable speakers in disseminating these concepts.

The evolving landscape of dental practice, particularly considering recent challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, has further highlighted the importance of adaptive, informed leadership within the field. Atchison et al. (2022)⁶ provide insights into the changing face of dentistry, advocating for improvements in diagnostic coding and value-based care to enhance oral health outcomes. Esteemed speakers, by sharing their expertise and perspectives, can catalyse these necessary trends within the profession, ensuring that dental practitioners are equipped to respond effectively to evolving challenges and opportunities.

Criteria for selecting speakers

Selecting the right speakers for dental education hinges on a multifaceted set of criteria designed to ensure that only the most qualified, knowledgeable and impactful individuals are entrusted with the responsibility of educating the next generation of dental professionals. These criteria are not just a checklist but a comprehensive approach to evaluating the potential contributions of a speaker to the dental community.

i) Academic credentials

Academic credentials form the cornerstone of a speaker's qualifications, underscoring their formal training and understanding of dentistry and oral health. This includes degrees from accredited dental schools, postgraduate qualifications and any additional certifications that demonstrate specialisation and advanced knowledge in specific areas of dentistry. These credentials ensure that speakers have a solid foundation in the principles and practices of dental medicine.

ii) Clinical experience

Clinical experience provides insight into a speaker's ability to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings. It enriches

the educational experience, offering nuanced perspectives on patient care, clinical decision-making and the practical challenges of dental practice. This experience is crucial for imparting practical skills and insights that are immediately applicable in clinical settings, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

iii) Publication history

A robust publication history signals a speaker's active engagement with research and their contribution to advancing dental science. This includes peer-reviewed articles, books and other scholarly works that add to the body of knowledge in dentistry. Such contributions are indicative of a speaker's expertise and their commitment to evidence-based practices and innovation in the field.

iv) Contributions to dental science

Beyond publications, contributions to dental science can include the development of new techniques, technologies or materials that advance dental care. It also encompasses involvement in professional organisations, dental education and mentorship roles that demonstrate leadership and a commitment to the future of dentistry.

v) Diversity in expertise

Emphasising diversity in expertise ensures comprehensive coverage of dental topics, catering to the broad spectrum of interests and educational needs within the dental community. This diversity allows for a rich, multidisciplinary approach to dental education, exposing learners to a wide range of perspectives, techniques and innovations.

vi) Rigorous vetting and peer-review processes

Finally, rigorous vetting and peer-review processes are essential for validating the reliability and validity of speakers. This includes scrutiny of their academic background, clinical experience, contributions to the field and ethical standards. Such processes safeguard the quality of knowledge dissemination, ensuring that dental education is guided by the highest standards of excellence and integrity.

The process of vetting and selection of speakers

The vetting and selection process for potential speakers in dental education is meticulous, beginning with a thorough review of the candidate's academic and professional credentials. This initial consideration ensures that speakers possess a foundational knowledge base and formal training essential for delivering high-quality education in dentistry and oral health. Peer recommendations offer invaluable insights into the candidate's expertise and reputation within the dental community, providing a layer of validation for the candidate's professional standing and ability to contribute positively to the educational landscape.⁷

Reviews of past presentations are scrutinised for content quality and audience engagement, ensuring that speakers can effectively communicate complex dental topics in an accessible and engaging manner. This aspect of vetting is crucial for identifying speakers who not only possess deep knowledge but are also capable of delivering it in a way that resonates with and educates the audience. Central to this process is the alignment with evidence-based practices, guaranteeing that the content delivered is both current and scientifically validated. Such alignment fosters an environment of continual learning and professional development, ensuring that dental education remains at the forefront of clinical and scientific advancements.⁸

The selection process must navigate challenges such as maintaining diversity of thought without sacrificing scientific accuracy, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives within the bounds of evidence-based dentistry. Balancing established voices with emerging talents is crucial, as it promotes a dynamic learning environment while fostering the next generation of dental professionals. This equilibrium encourages innovation and the sharing of cutting-edge research, ensuring the dental community remains at the forefront of clinical excellence and scientific discovery. The development of a guide to dental assessment based on a comprehensive literature review aids in this process, offering a framework for evaluating the competencies and contributions of potential speakers to dental education.⁹



Ensuring speakers are competent in comprehensive dental care and capable of addressing identified practice gaps further enhances the vetting process. This consideration ensures that dental education is not only grounded in current knowledge but is also responsive to the evolving needs of the profession and the communities it serves.¹⁰

Challenges and considerations

Navigating the selection process for dental education speakers involves confronting challenges such as ensuring diversity of thought without compromising scientific accuracy. This balance is crucial for fostering a broad spectrum of perspectives within the confines of evidence-based dentistry. The necessity to maintain this equilibrium presents a complex challenge, as highlighted by Robertson, who underscores the critical forces affecting dental education, including shifting demographics and the patterns of oral disease, which demand a diversified yet scientifically rigorous approach to education.¹¹

Moreover, the balance between established voices and emerging talents in the dental field is paramount. This fosters an environment of innovation and knowledge sharing, ensuring that the dental community remains at the forefront of clinical excellence and scientific discovery. Masella and Thompson delve into the divide between traditional teaching methods and evidence-based educational practices in dental education, emphasising the importance of bridging this gap to enhance the learning environment. Their work suggests that integrating research-based practices can address some of the challenges in selecting speakers by ensuring that the content delivered is both innovative and grounded in scientific evidence.¹²

Livingston et al. highlight another critical consideration: the ageing and diminishing dental faculty, which underscores the urgency of incorporating new talents into the educational framework. Their analysis sheds light on the demographic challenges facing dental education, emphasising the need for a strategic approach to faculty recruitment and development to ensure a vibrant and diverse educational community.¹³

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to enhance the selection process, ensuring it is inclusive, scientifically rigorous and forward-thinking. Baum et al. further support this notion by discussing the importance of making research advances relevant for dental students and faculty alike, advocating for global networks and dedicated funding to overcome individual institutional limitations.¹⁴ These considerations underscore the multifaceted nature of selecting speakers for dental education, highlighting the importance of strategic planning and innovation to address the evolving needs of the dental community.

Conclusion

In the realm of dental education, the meticulous selection of speakers transcends the mere act of filling a speaking slot; it embodies a commitment to advancing the field through a rich tapestry of knowledge, innovation and diversity. The process, as explored in this editorial, underscores a deliberate and thoughtful journey towards curating a line-up that not only disseminates cutting-edge scientific discoveries but also nurtures the growth of dental professionals at every stage of their careers. The challenges and considerations we've navigated – balancing diversity of thought with scientific rigour, marrying established expertise with fresh perspectives – serve as a beacon, guiding our collective efforts to elevate dental education to new heights.

As we move forward, it is paramount that we embrace these complexities as opportunities to enrich our educational offerings. The convergence of evidence-based practices with the dynamic energy of emerging talents offers a unique alchemy for innovation and excellence in dental education. By fostering an environment that values inclusivity and scientific integrity, we pave the way for a future where dental professionals are not only skilled practitioners but also lifelong learners and pioneers at the forefront of oral health.

Let this editorial serve as a call to action for all stakeholders in dental education to engage in the continuous refinement of our speaker selection processes. Together, we can ensure that our educational platforms are arenas for intellectual rigour, inspiration and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. In doing so, we honour the legacy of those who have laid the foundations of dental science, while charting a course for a future replete with possibilities yet to be imagined.

In conclusion, the art of selecting speakers for dental education is a testament to our dedication to the highest standards of excellence in the dental community. It is through this lens of commitment, creativity and collaboration that we will continue to curate educational experiences that not only inform but also inspire, ensuring that the dental profession remains at the cutting edge of medical science and patient care. Let us move forward with the resolve to embrace these challenges, turning them into stepping stones for the advancement of dental education and, ultimately, the betterment of patient outcomes worldwide.

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