

GLOBAL POSTGRADUATE DENTAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

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Higher education and learning are highly respected in all cultures and nations around the world. Most applicants in graduate and postgraduate academic programs have a desire to further their academic pursuits and contribute to their field of expertise in varying capacities. Enhanced understanding of one's area of interest also inculcates the seed of rational and critical thinking, which are essential attributes for professional success.

The exponential increase in the number of dentists graduating from dental colleges in Pakistan each year is highly commendable. However, the number of dental specialists with quality postgraduate dental education (PGDE) training is still rather low.¹ This may be attributed to a number of factors, foremost of which is a paucity of PGDE opportunities in Pakistan.

A solution to the problem lies in seeking advanced dental training overseas, the most popular destinations being the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.² In North America, most of the United States and Canadian universities offer 1-2-year Advanced Education in General Dentistry (AEGD)/General Practice Residency (GPR) programs that are ideal for fresh graduates desirous of honing their skills or for potential applicants to specialty programs. Alternately, residency/specialty postgraduate programs, ranging from 2-3 years are offered in clinical dental specialties. Some of these programs directly accept foreign

trained dentists, whereas others require a U.S./Canadian dental degree.^{3,4} Additionally, one-year fellowships are also available to dental specialists who have already received specialty training in their home countries. Most of these programs, in state as well as private dental schools, charge tuition fees, which when combined with living expenses can be rather prohibitory for most students from developing countries. The other options available for international students are research oriented M.S. or Ph.D. programs in Oral Biology or Biomaterials.⁵ These are ideally suited to those with a penchant for research and teaching. Those wishing to pursue clinical research can apply to Master's programs in clinical and translational research offered by many top ranked universities. Dental auxiliaries, particularly hygienists, also undergo rigorous training and have options to pursue advanced programs such as M.S. and Ph.D. The flexibility of the education system allows students to explore related healthcare career opportunities in public health e.g. M.P.H., D.P.H. and healthcare administration e.g. M.H.A. as well. Details of all these programs and more opportunities can be found at <http://www.ada.org/>³, <http://www.adea.org/Pages/default.aspx>⁴ and <http://www.asdanet.org/>⁵.

Most European countries offer similar PGDE training programs as their North American counterparts. France, Germany, Turkey and the Netherlands are known for their quality PGDE and the strong emphasis placed on dental research. International students might be required to learn the official language of the respective country; however, some Universities do offer teaching in English language. United Kingdom is a preferred destination for higher dental education compared to most other European Union nations as there is no added burden on the student to learn a foreign language. That said, Scandinavian coun-

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tries in Northern Europe, including Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland offer world class education that is usually not as expensive as that offered by English speaking nations. Research funding and opportunities also abound in these countries.

Australia and New Zealand are also preferred destinations by international students. The tuition cost and living expenses are again on the higher side with little to no financial aid available, but the education and research opportunities are among the best. Closer to home, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore are also available alternatives. State universities in these countries have collaborative programs with developing countries to allow easy exchange of ideas and personnel.

Application packets to most universities typically comprise of an application form, official transcripts, letters of recommendation and a curriculum vitae (CV). Additional information includes scores of standardized dental exams such as the United States National Board Dental Examination (NBDE) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). International students are also required to demonstrate proficiency in English by satisfactorily passing either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Finally, documentary proof of sufficient funds to pay

the university tuition costs and living expenses is also required before a visa may be issued.

The world is shrinking and becoming a global village, thanks to technological advancements in communication. In this era of ever-expanding globalization, it is imperative that we collaborate and assimilate new ideas to the best of our abilities. This is only possible in the profession of dentistry if dental health professionals appreciate the perspective of their counterparts in neighboring countries and continents. Information can thus be shared and collaborations fostered for the betterment of all concerned.

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5. Dentistry Links (American Student Dental Association): <http://www.asdanet.org/dentistry-links.aspx>