

Preparing for a career in oral and maxillofacial surgery: A survey of dentists at medical schools

C. MacIver^a, G.A Chiu^{b,*}

^a PRHO, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Manchester, UK

^b SHO, Royal Hope Hospital, Salford, UK

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Abstract

A questionnaire was sent to the 112 dental graduates who were doing a second degree in medicine in the United Kingdom (UK) in the academic year 2002–2003. Seventy-four students replied. The most common time from graduating from dental school to returning to medical school was 36 months. Of the 74 respondents 50 (68%) wrote that they intended to return to oral and maxillofacial surgery.

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Introduction

For those wishing to pursue a career in oral and maxillofacial surgery (OMFS) a double degree (dentistry and medicine) allows the candidate to complete the requirements set by the British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (BAOMS).¹ There have been four reports during the past four decades, that have studied these people^{2–5} and there have been a number of developments since the last study.⁵ These include the introduction of the examination for member of faculty of dental surgery (MFDS); the establishment of new medical schools; an increasing number of medical schools that allow direct entry into clinical years; and the introduction of tuition fees. A substantial change to come will be the implementation of “foundation programmes”⁶ in August 2005 and the proposed “seamless” basic surgical training (BST)⁷ starting in 2007 at the earliest. How this will affect the specialty of OMFS is one of the main topics of debate.

Our aims were to find out the number of dental graduates who have returned to medical school, to ascertain their entry requirements to medical school, and to estimate the number

who wish to pursue a career in maxillofacial surgery. We hope that a comparison of these findings with previous studies will provide some idea of the future shape of the specialty.

Method

A questionnaire was sent by either post or email to dental graduates who were currently at medical schools. The names and addresses were obtained from several sources, including current members of the BAOMS who had student status and delegates who had previously attended the conferences of the medical student group (MSG). These people were asked to forward a copy of the questionnaire to other dental graduates within their medical school. To find out the total number of dental graduates, the admissions office of each medical school in the UK was contacted by telephone or email. Copies of the questionnaire were also sent or emailed to the medical schools to distribute to dental graduates.

The questionnaire contained simple multiple-choice questions about several areas of the current stage of training. These included general questions about personal details such as age and sex. Specific questions asked which year they were in, whether they were from home or overseas, how old they were

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 161 787 7373.

E-mail address: Geoffchiu@btinternet.com (G.A Chiu).

when they entered medical school, their reason for going to medical school, what the entry requirements were, and how many dentally qualified students were in their year. Supplementary questions asked where and when they qualified in dentistry, what they had done until their entry into medical school, what jobs they did while at medical school, and what their future career intentions were. Overseas students were asked if there were any specific entry requirements.

Results

Response

For reasons of confidentiality, the admissions units at medical schools were allowed to give out only the number of dental graduates that it had in each year, but no names. It was calculated that in the academic year 2002–2003 there were a total of 112 dental graduates at medical school (Table 1). Most dental graduates attempt to be admitted into the third year of the medical course, and this is reflected in the lower numbers of dental graduates in the first and second years of the courses. Birmingham, Leeds, London (Guy's, King's and St Thomas's) and The Royal London had the highest number of dental graduates. Birmingham, Leeds, The Royal London, Manchester and Newcastle offer a reduced course of 3 years to dental graduates.

Table 1
Dental graduates at medical schools during academic year 2002–03 ($n = 112$)

	Year					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Aberdeen	–	3	1	1	–	5
Belfast (Queen's)	–	–	–	–	–	0
Birmingham	–	–	8	5	5	18
Bristol	–	1	1	1	–	3
Cambridge	–	–	–	–	–	0
Cardiff	–	2	3	–	3	8
Dublin	–	–	–	–	–	0
Dundee	–	1	–	–	–	1
Edinburgh	–	–	1	–	–	1
Glasgow	3	–	2	–	–	5
Leeds	–	–	7	2	1	10
Leicester	–	–	–	–	1	1
Liverpool	–	–	1	1	1	3
London-GKT	–	4	4	–	5	13
London-St Barts	–	–	–	6	8	14
London-St Georges	–	2	–	–	1	3
London-UCL	1	3	–	–	1	5
Manchester	1	–	1	4	2	8
Newcastle	–	–	1	2	1	4
Nottingham	–	–	–	–	–	0
Oxford	–	–	–	–	–	0
Sheffield	1	1	1	1	1	5
St Andrews	–	–	1	–	–	1
Southampton	1	–	1	–	1	3
Warwick	–	–	–	1	–	1
Total	7	17	33	24	31	112

Seventy-four (66%) dental graduates replied; the rest failed to communicate despite numerous reminders by email and post. Of the 74 responders, 51 (69%) were male and 23 (31%) were female.

The mode age of entry was 28 years with a range of 25–42 years. Fifty-three (72%) students entered medical school between the ages of 26 and 29 years. Sixteen students (22%) were 30 years or more on entering medical school.

Fifty-six (76%) of the respondents qualified from dental schools in the UK, of whom 17 (30%) returned to the same university. The remaining 18 respondents (24%) qualified overseas. This included 12 from the Indian subcontinent, and one each from Greece, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Singapore and New Zealand.

Entry to medical school

Third year entry

Thirty-two students (43%) entered into the third year of the medical course, of whom 29 (90%) had either full MFDS/FDS ($n = 18$) or MDFS part B/DS part 1 ($n = 11$). Of the remaining three, two had MFDS part A and one had no higher dental qualification. The mean interval after qualifying from dental school was 4.7 years, (mode 5).

Second year entry

Twenty-three (31%) entered into year two, 15 of whom had either full MFDS/FDS ($n = 14$) or MDFS part B/FDS part 1 ($n = 1$). Four had MFDS part A, and four had no higher dental qualification. The mean interval after qualifying from dental school was 4.7 years, (mode 3).

First year entry

Nineteen students (26%) were enrolled for the full 5-year course. Seven had either MFDS/FDS ($n = 5$) or MDFS part B/FDS part 1 ($n = 2$). Two had only MFDS part A. The other 10 had no higher dental qualification. The mean interval after qualifying from dental school into the first year was 4.5 years (mode 3).

The requirements for overseas dental graduates was a financial guarantee and in one case successful passing of the International English Language Test Examination. Experience before medical school (Table 2).

Table 2
Experience before medical school ($n = 74$)

Senior house officer in OMFS	66 (89)
Vocational training practitioner	38 (51)
Senior house officer in dentistry	35 (47)
General dental practice	17 (23)
Registrar in OMFS	7 (9)
Staff grade in OMFS	4 (5)
Army dentist	1 (1)
Community dental officer	1 (1)

OMFS: oral and maxillofacial surgery. Data are number (%).

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