

Dentistry Students Develop their Decalogue

Universidad Autonoma del Estado de Mexico, MEXICO

Background

Dentistry is a branch of medicine focused on the oral health of each individual. The teaching of dentistry in Mexico is comparable with world renowned institutions due to its teaching methods. It is also a field that has seen impressive development in clinical procedures over the last decade. Environmental educators in the Universidad Autonoma del Estado de Mexico (the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico) found the dentistry department at the university to be open and willing to consider the role of ethics in their field. The Earth Charter was used as the guiding framework in the process.

Aim

The intention of the project is to reincorporate 'humanistic education' into dentistry curricula with the purpose of training students to have a holistic vision of their work and to always have an ethical commitment to the medical occupation they carry out.

Participants

The participants for this project are the department of dentistry in the Universidad Autonoma del Estado de Mexico.

Timeframe

The programme began in September 2002 and is ongoing.



Preparing the decalogue

Description

The programme's thematic structure is organized on the following learning units:

- 1- Environmental Education knowledge building
- 2- Sustainable development and globalization
- 3- Social Institutions in Environmental Education
- 4- The dentist and his or her participation in the Environment Education field.

As part of the individual activities, students are asked to: "Read, analyze and discuss the Earth Charter with your student classmates. Then prepare a Decalogue, or ten points of ethical references that should guide your life as a dentist and as a citizen of a sustainable society, based on the Earth Charter." Each of the 125 students developed their own *Dentist's Decalogue*.

The Dentistry Department then decided to organize a 10-day online forum, where each student discussed what were the most important ethical guidelines for them. The goal was to jointly construct a shared set of ethical guidelines for the Department, based on the content of the Earth Charter.

The final ten principles to be included in the final Decalogue took place through a voting for each of the principles proposed by the students (approximately 200 principles). Once the analysis of the participation and the counting was carried out, the Decalogue of ethical guidelines was finalized. It was presented in class, where students analyzed how it was going to be submitted to the entire Department and to private practice dentists.

Funding

No external funding was needed for the project, beyond the Department's own resources and infrastructure.

Results

The Dentist's Decalogue was published in the internal bulletin of the Dentistry Department, posted on the website, and disseminated in a printed form in the Department's different academic and cultural events jointly with the promotion of the Earth Charter.

The programme, *Bioethics and Education for Sustainable Development* (PROBIOEDS) was created in June 2003 in order to promote an alternative culture of bioethical coexistence, responsibility towards human beings and their environment. This programme includes the

participation of students, educators and administrative personnel.

The project resulted in a greater commitment when the entire university formally endorsed the Earth Charter on 20 September 2004. With this, the Universidad Autonoma del Estado de Mexico became the first higher education institution in Mexico to officially commit to promote, disseminate and internalize the Earth Charter principles.

Conclusion

This dentistry department experience shows that indeed the Earth Charter can inspire students and be used in a variety of fields.

Dentistry, as well as other fields of medicine should take into consideration the sustainable development education in the formation of new professionals. Each profession needs to shy away from scientific fragmentation and look to integrate knowledge from different learning fields. This is an important step in the construction of a better life for human beings, and the planet we live in.



At a recycling drive

This case was directly drawn from:

- *La Carta de la Tierra, una experiencia en el nivel educativo superior.*
La Facultad de Odontología de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México.