



EVALUATION OF EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTION OF INTERNS OF DENTAL COLLEGE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC - A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Bachelor of dental surgery (BDS) is a five year undergraduate degree program. When student pass final BDS examination, they have to complete, compulsory one year of rotatory internship program. Internship is a period when the fresh graduates refine their skill; get the clinical and professional skill. And above all increase their community skill while dealing with the patient. But the Covid pandemic has affected the internship program of the fresh dental graduates.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE: To evaluate the experiences & perception of interns of dental college during Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY: A cross sectional study was conducted among interns of VSPM's Dental college & Research Centre, Nagpur.

RESULTS: Out of 108 participants 93 (86%) of them said that Covid-19 crisis affected their internship training and achievement skill. 73 (68%) of them said decrease in patients during Covid-19 pandemic affected their skills and experience. 63 (58%) of interns did not preferred online learning experience over hands on experience while 23 (21%) of them preferred it.

CONCLUSION: For the interns, internship is the bonus period where they refine their clinical skills. Due to the crisis they had got less exposure to patients due to decrease in number of patients. But at the same time they got a different experience while working in this pandemic situation. They learnt how to handle the situation while working in the pandemic situation.

KEYWORDS: Internship program , dental interns, Covid-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

In the month of December 2019, a novel corona virus was first identified at Wuhan, China. Initially it was restricted to China only but within a short period it spread out in other countries. In the month of March it spread to India¹. India is found to be second highest country which is affected worse due to Covid-19 pandemic. In India, Maharashtra stands the highest Covid-19 burden state and the Nagpur city of Maharashtra state, orders 4th in terms of informed Covid-19 cases². On 12th March, the first case of Covid-19 was found in Nagpur city of Maharashtra¹. Covid-19 is declared as a worldwide pandemic globally by world health organization³.

To control the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, on 24th March 2020, Government of India declared a nationwide lockdown for 21 days for restricting the movement of 138 crore population of India⁴. Till 31st May 2020, the lockdown period was stretched in different phases. From 8th June 2020, the unlocking of lockdown started in phases⁵.

The effect of Covid-19 is seen in each sector, it has disturbed the medical, dental education and healthcare system too. Due to the extremely infectious nature of the virus it was hard to continue lectures and clinical postings of the students and interns which had highly affected the dental education³.

The present study participants had appeared final BDS exam late as per the Government policy due to lockdown. Due to this the internship program of this batch started late. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the institute had arranged interns orientation program online. Also the first clinical posting was conducted online. After that the interns joined the college and they were allowed to do the clinical work by following the Covid protocol. When the second wave was in peak during the April–May 2021; that time again the restriction has laid down in the internship program as per the institute decision. After the

decline of this second wave, interns rejoined and started the clinical practice.

Mainly the dental internship program is meant to improve the intern's skill, developing their skill and capabilities, improvement in conversing and professional skill. Internship program also develop intern's scientific research skill and boost community and volunteer dental projects⁶. But due to Covid pandemic the overall OPD patients were reduced so the interns had received less exposure during their posting. So the expectations of interns towards internship are not fulfilled that much.

So a need was felt to evaluate the experiences & perception of interns of dental college during Covid-19 pandemic.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To evaluate the experiences and perception of interns of dental college during Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Institutional ethical committee approval was obtained from the institute before conducting a study with a reference number of IEC/VSPMDCRC/44/2021. A questionnaire based cross sectional study was conducted among the interns of VSPM's Dental College and Research Centre, Nagpur. Ten item pre-validated questionnaire⁷ was typed in the google form. The link of which was shared with the study participants. Participants were asked to complete online socio-demographic details. The data collection was carried out for a period of one month.

TOOLS USED

A pre- validated questionnaire of ten questions was used. All the questions were close ended.

Table- Participants responses towards the questions-

Questions	Responses in number n-108	Responses in %
Crisis of Covid-19 affected internship training and achievement of clinical skills.		
Yes	93	86
No	11	10
May be	4	4

Decrease in patients during Covid-19 pandemic affected skills and experience. Yes No May be	73 21 14	68 19 13
Clinical procedures carried out on the patient during Covid-19 pandemic. Yes No May be	51 49 8	47 45 7
Attitude and communication with patients is same as before Covid-19 Yes No May be	42 53 13	39 49 12
Got enough awareness and experience to work during Covid-19. Yes No May be	31 53 24	29 49 22
Knowing of recommended infection control standards to be followed in this crisis. Yes No May be	59 21 28	55 19 26
Got enough awareness and experience to prevent Covid- 19 transmission in clinical setting. Yes No May be	42 34 32	39 31 30
Current crisis is affecting public health education level Yes No May be	50 22 36	46 20 33
Quarantine during the pandemic gave more time to learn new things and develop a new skill. Yes No May be	28 47 33	26 44 31
Preference of online learning experience over hands on experience Yes No May be	23 63 22	21 58 20

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was collected and analysed with the help of percentage analysis.

RESULTS

Out of 108 participants, 93 were female and 15 were male with average age of 23 years. According to the first question 93 (86%) of study participants said Covid-19 crisis affected their internship training and achievement of clinical skills. 73 (68%) of them said decrease in patients during Covid-19 pandemic affected their skills and experience. During Covid-19 pandemic 51 (47%) of interns carried out clinical procedures on the patient while 49 (45%) did not carry out any procedure on patients. At the same time 42 (39%) of interns experienced that their attitude and communication with patients was changed as before Covid-19 while for 53 (49%) it was not changed. 31 (29%) of participant thought that they got enough awareness and experience to work during Covid-19 while 53 (49%) of them thought that they have not got the enough experience. 59 (55%) of the participants knew the recommended infection control standards to be followed in this crisis but about 21 (19%) were not knowing.

The next question was about participant's awareness and experience to prevent Covid-19 transmission in clinical setting where the authors received very mixed responses 42 (39%) were aware about it, 34 (31%) were not aware and 32 (30%) were in doubt. When the authors asked about crisis effect on public health education level; in this about 50 (46%) of the participants said that it is affected while for 22 (20%) it was not affected. About 28 (26%) of interns thought that being quarantine during the pandemic gave them more time to learn new things and develop a new skill but for 47 (44%) it was not. 63 (58%) of interns did not prefer online learning experience over hands on experience while 23 (21%) of them preferred it. The detail result of study questionnaire is given in table.

DISCUSSION

2021 year was a real challenging year for the citizen of Nagpur. Nagpurians perceived the second wave of Covid-19 and subsequent destruction and deceases of it. The increase of second wave of Covid-19 started in middle of March 2021 and reached the peak in May 2021. The second wave behaved like a Tsunami and many families lost their near and dear ones⁸.

Both medical and dental health care workforce were under greater risk of getting infected with this disease. Dental care settings was a favorable place for disease transfer⁷. During the Covid pandemic, the number of patients visiting for routine treatment were reduced¹. So, interns were getting less number of patients for treatment and so they were getting reduced number of the patient for clinical treatment. Even, some interns were not doing their internship regularly due to the fear of being infected.

The present study participants had started their internship late due to lockdown and late conduction of examination. They had started their internship in December 2020, three months late of scheduled period. This present study collected the responses of the interns during the month of July-August 2021, when the second wave peak had just gone.

According to DCI and MUHS, Nashik University, an intern has to complete their one year rotatory internship in each department and complete the necessary quota to avail the degree certificate. Internship is the time where the intern learns the clinical skills, gets the confidence to handle the patient independently and develop a trustworthy relation with the patient. Doing internship in Covid pandemic was a different experience for each intern. Wearing PPE kit, face shield was a different experience. But at the same time they had to work following the strict Covid protocol. During peak time of second wave of Covid pandemic, the institute took the decision of suspension of internship for that period. Because of this the interns had missed allotted department's internship and also missed the experiences they might have got from that department. Most of them missed the aerosol practice of hand piece, ultrasonic scalers and also the practice of taking intra oral peri-apical X-ray etc., as all these facilities were suspended during that period.

The literature showed many studies which have accessed the psychological effect on the interns due to this pandemic^{3,9,11} but very few studies had found which has accessed the effect on internship due to Covid pandemic⁷. The present study is one of its kind which had tried to get the interns experiences and perception while working in this pandemic situation of Covid-19.

This Covid-19 pandemic affected each sector, about 86% of the present study participants thought that this pandemic had affected their internship training and achievement of clinical skills. The study⁷ which has been conducted in Saudi Arabia where the authors compared the effect of Covid pandemic on dental and medical interns. Their study result also showed similar results where the authors found that about 76.3% of the dental interns thought that the crisis of covid-19 affected their internship training and achievement of clinical skills.

During this pandemic many people were avoiding dental visit or postponing their dental treatment¹ because of which the number of patients visiting dental institutes has reduced; in the present study also 68% of the study participants told that reduced number of patients affected their skill and experience. But still 47% of the study participants had performed clinical procedure on patients while 45% did not perform. Due to this 49% of them thought that they did not receive enough awareness and experience to work during this crisis. 75.9% of participants of the previous study⁷ also thought that they can carry out clinical procedure during this pandemic and about 72.3% of the interns thought that they received enough awareness and experience to work during covid-19 which is opposite to the present study results. While Hrishikesh et al⁹ found that 71.7% of their study participants are not confident to practice with the training that they received.

Whenever a patient visits an OPD, there is a proper way to get started, but during this pandemic the OPD patient had to attend first with the Covid-19 related questions. So definitely the communication is changed with the patients. It has become more precise and specific for the safe practice. 49% of the present study participants said that their behavior and communication is changed due to this pandemic while for 57.3% of the participants of study also⁷ thought that their attitude and communication with patients is not remained same as before covid-19.

The main purpose of orientation program for the interns to guide the students regarding the different treatment procedures that are given to the patient in different departments. During this Covid pandemic special attention was given regarding the following of Covid protocol for self and patient safety. About 55% of the study participants thought that they knew the recommended infection control standards to be followed in this crisis also 81.8% of the previous study participants⁷ knew the recommended infection control standards to be followed in this crisis.

When the present study participants actually got into the clinical practice they were found to be in dilemma; because 39% of them thought that they got enough awareness and experience to prevent Covid-19 transmission in clinical setting, 31% thought they did not received it while 30% of them were confused whether they received it or not.

In internship, the interns learn about a communication with the patient which help them in maintaining the relation of trust in between them and patient. But due to Covid, every one of us is following Covid protocol. We are making short visit to avoid the exposure; so the authors presumed that 46% of the present study participants thought that current crisis is affecting their public health education level. The previous study⁷ result are also showed that for 62.3% of the interns thought that the current crisis is affecting their public health education level while 74.3% of the interns thought that quarantine during the pandemic gave them more time to learn new things and develop a new skill. In the present study also when the second wave of Covid pandemic was in peak, the internship was suspended. Many of the interns also got infected during this time. So the authors tried to get their perception during this quarantine does they utilized it in learning something new but only 24% of them were taken it positively but 44% of them had not utilized this period. The last question was based on their perception of online internship as this batch of interns attended their orientation program and first posting online. Only 21% of the participants were in favor of online learning and 58% wanted hand on experience. These result are similar to previous study⁷ result where 53.0% of interns did not prefer online learning experience over hands on experience.

CONCLUSION

For the interns, internship is the bonus period where they can refine their clinical skills. This pandemic affected each sector. Definitely the internship of dental interns was also affected. Due to the crisis patients were attending less in number for getting their routine dental treatment done. So, the interns got

less exposure to patients. But, of course they got a different experience while working in this pandemic situation. They learnt how to handle the situation while working in the pandemic situation.

LIMITATIONS

It was a questionnaire based study so the answers attempted by the participants can be biased. Also the study population was limited to a single institution thus; these results cannot be generalized.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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