

Dentistry- A noble profession or a profitable business??

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Abstract

The debate being whether dentistry is a noble profession or a profitable business has been around since the advent of better facilities pertaining to the field. The desire to have the best outcome via latest technology is often reinforced with monetary backup. The constant improving treatment modalities are accompanied by increase in the cost. Dentistry is a profession with unique combination of business and professionalism. It is a business in terms of set up required and profession in terms of the benefit given to the society by utilizing one's skill or training.

Keywords: Profession, Business, Dentistry

Introduction

The income tax section 2(3) defines business as "any trade, commerce, manufacturing activity or concern in nature of trade and commerce". It is plainly, any economic activity which is carried on for earning profits and does not mandatorily require any basic training or skills to commence the venture.

A profession on the other hand is defined as a "job requiring some thought, skill and special knowledge as well as training in that particular field". The acquisition of technical / academic qualification is essential to join a profession which focuses on service of the community as primary intention and profits are secondary.

Dilemma – profession or business??

The question arising in the present day scenario is – Is dentistry still a profession or is it a well marketed business? The current image of a dental professional has an eroded stature in public. The tag of being a professional is associated with high levels of expertise, skillfulness, virtuousness, trust as well as to have a market value and social status. The point to be pondered upon is –are the level of expertise and social class both are the deciding factors for dentistry being a profession, does the profession needs a society or is it vice versa?

Historically, dentistry has evolved from the paths of barber surgeons, which was essentially a business enterprise and they were publicized as businessmen. Later on, with the advent of proper training and technical skill development, the modern era of dentistry emerged- "dentist as a professional, upholding the social contract of serving the community without the contemplation for profits / benefits.

The contemporary debate on the conversion of dental profession into business is a brain child of the coeval class of patients who started propagating dentistry as a money making enterprise run by dentists.

Ironically, the modern aesthetic conscious society has paved the way for the dental professionals to research, develop and acquire new skills and techniques to enhance the cosmetic results which in turn requires efforts, expenses in terms of time and resources. Dentistry as a profession in itself is expensive, collectively viewing the cost of equipment, materials, latest technology and workshops attended to adopt a particular skill when compared to our medical counterparts. The evolution of dentistry and advancement in the field is like a vicious cycle, the so called affluent strata of the society demands or rather expects an excellent outcome and co relates it with latest technology utilized to achieve the same however costly it is. This constant urge for good, better, best and now the "bestest" aesthetics has led to continuous research of newer modalities to appease the patients.

The dental profession is a unique articulated blend of business and professional art. It is a business as regular investments are required to be abreast with the changing and emerging trends, and these skills are utilized for the benefit of the society giving dentistry its status of profession. If we stuck to the "social contract" which surfaced in medieval times, then the entire field of dentistry would have perished as aspiring to serve and sustain without currency is non-realistic. The ethical standards as well as the code of conduct has prevented and guarded the conversion of this profession into business. The dental services cannot be compared with day to day commodities working on demand and supply basis. The very true foundation of this profession is on the existence of trust between the patient and dentist in which former is lacking the knowledge of dental services or the level of expertise of latter and works on the sole basis of mutual trust.

The emergence of "corporate dentistry", dental clinical chains controlled by non-professional individuals with motive of earning profits is threatening

and disturbing as the owners or employers set profit related targets to be achieved by the employed dentists, which further leads to promotion of certain treatments with higher revenue generation rather than choosing options best suited for the patients.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, Indian Dental Association recognizes that the trust in dental profession is based on individual commitment to ethical standards. Having said that it again may not be always in lines of ethical conduct and is ever evolving as it is more of a feedback from the interaction between dentist and society. This can often reinforce the dilemma of considering dentistry as a profession or business. The dentistry at its commencement was a business which has now emerged as a profession worldwide owing to the ethical treatment provision for prevailing dental ailments after acquiring special skills and training. The trust of the patients and society in the capabilities of dentist has granted this occupation the status of profession. However, in the coming years, future of dentistry may revert back to its roots of business by “corporatization” of this noble field by business enthusiast, adamant on earning huge profits at the stake of society and the dawn of which has already risen.

Author believes that some sort of standardization in treatment protocol as well as the revenue generated from the basic procedures is in order to avoid the “corporatization” of this profession with high ethics. Following the standardization the paradigm will shift from generating profits to providing a quality treatment as that will be the only incentive remaining for those who are truly dedicated to the profession.

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