

Objective: To determine if experience in a hospital-based dental clinic (D-clinic) influences undergraduate dental students' comfort with providing dental care to persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Methods: Data collection occurred in two phases: (I) close to the start, and (II) near the end of the students' rotation through D-clinic. Both phases included a survey, which was supported by a focus group. All students in the Dentistry Class of 2012 (n=94) at the University of Toronto were invited to participate by email invitation. Questions explored the students' experience, concerns and comfort with providing dental care to PWDs; either multiple-choice, or scored 1 (strongly disagree/not at all) – 5 (strongly agree/very much).

Results: Phase-I (n=45/48% response; 66% female; mean age 28.7 years) and phase-II participants (n=42/45% response; 59% female; mean age 29.2 years) were representative of the class. Previous non-clinical experience with PWDs was a significant predictor of comfort ($P<.001$); however, there was no significant difference in comfort between respondents in phase-I and phase-II. Fewer respondents in phase-II were willing to provide dental care to individuals with developmental delay when compared to respondents in phase-I ($P=.018$). The majority of respondents (71%) in phase-II valued D-clinic as part of their undergraduate dental training; 55% desired additional clinical experience to increase their comfort with providing dental care to PWDs.

Conclusions: Regarding dental care for PWDs, there was no significant change in comfort among respondents in phase-I and phase-II. Comfort appeared dependent on prior non-

clinical experience. Fewer respondents near the end of D-clinic were interested in providing dental care to individuals with developmental delay. The majority of respondents considered the rotations valuable with a desire for more experience.