



Editorial

## Knowledge and skills in dentistry

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Received : 13 December 2022

Accepted : 13 December 2022

Published : 02 January 2023

**DOI**

10.25259/JADE\_62\_2022

**Quick Response Code:**



Undergraduate curricula in dentistry prepare students for a life in dentistry as it is practiced now. All dental schools impart also the concept of lifelong learning, skills in the scientific method, in scientific inquiry, logical and systematic review, and most importantly research, these latter skills prepare students for changes that will inevitably occur throughout their practicing life. Without these skills, students will be stuck in the past from graduation.

During my 37 plus years in dentistry (and specifically in oral and maxillofacial surgery), there have been many changes, changes in the promotion of health rather than treatment only of disease, changes in cariology and management, periodontal disease understanding, and major changes in diagnostics and practice management, to name but a few. Fundamentally, dentists have had the tools to embrace and incorporate all these changes and modifications to their practice.

In the last decade, there has been an explosion in technology and the application of this technology, fine detail computerized tomograms, intra and extraoral scanning, virtual surgical planning for surgical and dental procedures, and the construction of patient-specific devices, crowns, inlays, splints, and implantable surgical guides and implants.

The question that I often get asked is – Do we really need to spend time in our busy dental school curricula covering aspects that no longer required, impressions, crown manufacture, model surgery for assessment, and management of dentofacial deformities.

My answer is always a resounding YES.

If students understand the process (not the tools) and have the basic knowledge that they are able to apply the advanced and the new technologies, often it is poorly understood that the new technology is just another tool at our disposal. If the process and the basics are missing, learning is by rote memory. In oral and maxillofacial surgery, virtual surgical planning can only be mastered if you understand three-dimensional models and the surgery itself.

In the future with deeper understanding this may change, my philosophy is always to understand the pathway and basics, from there everything else will follow, an example is anatomy, fundamental understanding (not knowledge) of anatomy comes from an understanding of embryology, from embryology, you can work out the anatomy.

I will finish modifying an old proverb “If you give a man a fish you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.”

-----If you teach a person the pathway rather than just giving them the facts, you will ensure they always have the means to succeed-----

**How to cite this article:** Sambrook PJ. Knowledge and skills in dentistry. J Acad Dent Educ 2022;8:33.

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