"Dental practice is both a health profession and a business"

During our academic years in studying dentistry, we get all the raw information, the basic sciences, and all the needed basic dental skills to help us succeed in our career. But we are left with zero knowledge about business and management skills that one can never gain simply practicing dentistry; not in 7-10 years of practice!

Nowadays, many dental clinics have grown from being one or two-man practices to more complex businesses with a higher number of employees. This shift has added administrative duties as part of the dentists’ responsibilities. Therefore, dentists who own clinics need not to only be adept at performing dental treatments, but to have management skills as well.

From a business perspective, dental centers are one of the businesses that need high capital but generate little profit. Therefore, being able to develop a business model that increases revenues are one of the ways dental practice can gain from and be able to grow.

Unfortunately, most of the dentists and dental centers depend on their reputation for success as well as their practice location, equipment, and professionalism. Yet to realize that these aspects are not enough to achieve their goals and receive the expected revenue on the long term.

As a dental student, it must be your dream to build your own practice, and you will be very excited when you graduate to start this journey. But the first obstacle you will face is the financial issue, since you need a vast sum of money to start with.

In Jordan for example you will need at least 250,000 $ to furnish and start up your own center with 5 clinics, x-ray room and an attractive decoration. This huge amount usually is not accessible to most of us. So you start looking for resources, like a loan from a bank. However, getting a loan isn’t easy either, they ask for a business plan. This is where they drop a bombshell on you!

Dentists are not taught how to write a business plan during their studies! Here you are forced to face the fact that you’re not just applying what you learnt in dentistry school, but you are starting a real business!

With the economy getting worse with time, only the best managed dental practices will have the opportunity not only to survive but to grow in terms of revenues, profits and size. Running a successful practice also means coming up with strategies of giving patients the best.

This is not possible without deliberate management which requires specialized training. Here we all agree that as dentists we have never come across these terms in our universities! Vision, mission, goals, leadership, workflow, job description, cash flow, business plan, depreciation, SWOT analysis, SMART goals, scale of salary and many other terms considered to be the basics for any healthy business.
From this point of view, we, as the Jordanian Association of Dental Students- JADS, realized the need to arm our students with dental practice management skills before becoming trapped in the expanding business environment of dentistry.

Therefore, we signed an entrepreneurship partnership with the International Medical Training Academy in UK, presented by its CEO, Dr. Aref Al-Abed, who is not only a MBA holder, but a good speaker, trainer and, most importantly, a dentist with 8-years experience. This makes him the best person to deliver this course.

What is Dental Practice management course?

It is an intensive course that aims to give dental students, interns and dentists the required management and planning skills, and train them on how to run their own businesses with hands-on training that focus on various subjects;

1. Business Plan and Management: When starting a business, you need to have the ability to set a strategy for your practice that includes your vision, mission, goals and values, this is all part of building your future business. It is impossible to run a successful business without setting a strategy and following it. Also you need to be aware of how to effectively use Human Resource (HR) management and policies by setting a development plan for your staff, setting a clear method to recruit and evaluate your staff and be able to create KPI’s in your practice.

2. Accounting and finance: It is one of the most important skills in business. Unfortunately, many dentists do not have this skill. It’s important to understand the basics of accounting and finance principles, how to calculate depreciation and breakeven analysis, learn how to set a pricing method for your practice and monitor cash flow.

3. Marketing: After building a practice now you should be able to maintain and develop your business, discover successful ways on how to market your practice; marketing mix, brand your practice and determine your buying motives. These are unusual concepts for the dentists however these concepts are very important in marketing.

4. Leadership: Dental practice was never a one-man show, it is a teamwork in which the dentist must act as the leader for his assistant, receptionist, technician, and other dentists; if found. His job is to motivate them, train them, be responsible for their actions and keep pace with them, only then a dental business can reach to the top. Those who have the knowledge about the dental practice management will be in a much better position regarding handling their own practices. Not only would it increase revenues and profitability, but also increase the efficiency and productivity, leading to happier patients and happier practitioners. Dental practice management courses are suitable programs for everyone seeking a healthy business, giving you the confidence to manage your practice and lead your employees to reach your ultimate business goals and growth.
The 144th Executive Board meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO) took place in January this year. On behalf of the IADS, I was given the privilege to join the selected IFMSA delegation to join this meeting.

The WHO EB meeting takes place each January at the WHO headquarters in Geneva. During this meeting the Executive Board members agree upon the agenda for the World Health Assembly happening in May and the resolutions to be considered by the Health Assembly.

Months before the event our 11-member delegation had regular meetings and prepared Statements on 13 meeting agenda items to be read out. Non-state actors in official relations with WHO can write and read out statements on the meeting agenda items and partner organizations such as IADS can give their official endorsement. IADS supported the following items: 5.4 Implementation of the SDGs; 5.5 UHC; 5.6 Health environment and climate change, 5.8 Follow up on the high-level meetings - focused on NCDs, 6.3 Human resources for health, 6.4 Promoting the health of refugees and migrants, 7.3 Engagement with non-state actors. This kind of engagement is important from an advocacy and external relations viewpoint to IADS and will help to pave the way towards official non-state actor status for our association in the future.

During my stay in Geneva I had various meetings with current partners and discussed also new collaboration initiatives. Together with representatives of IFMSA and IVSA we met with WFPHA (World Federation of Public Health Associations) to discuss future projects and also potential membership for IADS. WFPHA joins together public health associations from all over the world and recently targets youth associations more in its work. IFMSA and IPSF have been members for years and IADS has also applied recently to become members. We can contribute to their Oral Health section, growing interprofessional healthcare network and help to diversify their congresses and events.

As most of you have heard, IADS is currently in the process of registering as a non-governmental organization (NGO) to Switzerland. This process has taken a long time and a lot of legal consultations on the way. Back in January I also met with the FDI Executive Director, Enzo Bondioni, to discuss both these registration procedures but also new platforms of collaboration between IADS and FDI.

I also met with Dr. Benoit Varenne, the WHO Oral Health Chief. We discussed the current Oral Health related work at the WHO and also IADS work on dental education and advocacy. Dr. Varenne is open to IADS members coming for internships to his department. Also an internship at the NCD department is a possibility through an IADS alumni working there. With continuous capacity building and coordination the IADS is working towards making this opportunity a reality for our members.
Last but not least an extensive part of my visit in January was dedicated to the WHO GHWN Youth Hub. The Youth Hub is an interprofessional network of student and young professional organizations in healthcare that was initiated 1.5 years ago to work on health workforce issues and prevent the projected 18 million health worker gap from happening by 2030. I am representing and working on behalf of IADS as one of the Steering Committee members and very recently we opened a call for membership to the Hub. At the WHO meeting we had a wonderful opportunity to have a meeting with the Director General of the WHO, Dr. Tedros. Together with Dr. Caline Mattar (Junior Doctors Network) we introduced him to the Youth Hub, a bit of its history, work plans and ideas. Dr. Tedros is concerned about closing the projected 18 million health worker gap by 2030 and sees youth as change makers. He is very supportive towards the hub and its plans. With the approaching World Health Assembly in May, also several means of youth engagement and youth events were discussed.

One of the aims of IADS listed in our Constitution is: “Inspiring dental students to use their knowledge and capacity to advocate for the prioritization of oral health within the global health agenda.” In order for oral health to be heard at the WHO and also on a national level we, the students, need to make our voices heard.