

# EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS BY PROMOTING UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY PROGRAMS AMONG DENTAL STUDENTS

EXPLORANDO NUEVOS HORIZONTES MEDIANTE LA PROMOCIÓN DE PROGRAMAS DE ROTACIÓN DE PREGRADO ENTRE ESTUDIANTES DE ODONTOLOGÍA

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Dental education at the undergraduate level focus on the training of students to become successful clinicians with a solid diagnostic criteria and technical skills, ready to solve the patients' needs. During this period, undergraduate students concentrate their efforts in obtaining as much knowledge of dentistry as possible, following the contents specified in the curriculum, and acquiring the skills through a series of clinical requirements which progressively increase in difficulty along the semesters <sup>(1)</sup>. On the other hand, other aspects such as soft skills, defined as interpersonal, self-promoted and non-technical qualities are not being properly addressed, specially at the undergraduate level <sup>(2)</sup>.

Current trends on modernization of the dental curriculum for undergraduate programs began to take off in in Peruvian undergraduate dental schools during the last decade. These trends, which includes the internationalization of students and faculty members, respond to the need to address current global health challenges <sup>(3)</sup>. In this context, dental schools in Peru have been making efforts over the past years to establish international agreements that allow their faculty and students to access mobility and/or exchange programs. Favorably, dental students are nowadays more familiar with English-based education materials, as research methodology courses are continuously encouraging them to obtain scientific literature in this language. Nevertheless, the percentage of dental students who get access to the academic offer abroad during the undergraduate program has been reported as low, in comparison with other fields, including medicine <sup>(4)</sup>.

Recently, all mobility and exchange programs that stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic have slowly resumed. As most people are now vaccinated, travelling abroad no longer poses a major risk, but an opportunity to explore new pathways for the student's career development. For undergraduate dental students, travelling abroad represent an opportunity to observe how dentist are trained in other realities, sharing experiences with their local student peers at the academic and personal levels. Also, they have the chance to know the infrastructure (e.g., the dental clinics or hospitals associated with the host dental schools) and observe lectures of different curriculum. Depending on the country of destination, undergraduate students will be able to communicate 100% using

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a foreign language. This is particularly important as they need to get along with other students, communicate their needs, express their opinions about the mobility/exchange program, or asking questions about the lectures, thus developing their soft skills in another language.

In the last 5 years, the School of Stomatology of Científica del Sur University has made it possible several inter-institutional agreements with top Universities all over the world, including Japan. For instance, three undergraduate students have been supported by the Japanese Government for short-term mobility programs, through a specific funding granted to Niigata University Faculty of Dentistry. This is particularly important as

there is no other Peruvian Dental School having such opportunity. Moreover, several agreements have been made effective with academic institutions in Europe and Latin America, also with great success. Establishing social relationships with other students who are facing the same challenges during the undergraduate years and, at the same time, dealing with a different perspective of dentistry according to each country's social and economic reality, will help to develop a global sense in our undergraduate dental students. We need to address undergraduate dental education not only in the professional/technical perspective, but also giving them the soft skills required to overcome current oral health-related challenges.

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