

Higher dental education in Bulgaria (past, present-day, future)

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Summary

On the basis of bibliography and the information submitted by the students' office at the Faculties of Stomatology – Sofia and Plovdiv, the author presents a short history and the situation of higher dental education in Bulgaria today. There are suggestions concerning the improvement of the system of dental education in Bulgaria in the near future.

Keywords: dental school, dental education, history of dentistry.

Introduction

Higher dental education in Bulgaria was established 63 years ago. On 24.06.1942 by virtue of decree ¹ 32 of the National Assembly a second section affiliated to the faculty of medicine at the University of Sofia was set up – the department of dentistry [1,3]. It was subdivided into three departments – Department of Conservative Dentistry, Department of Operative Dentistry with Orthodontics and

Department of Prosthetic Dentistry. Three Bulgarian dentists, graduates of Universities in Germany were appointed as heads of the departments [2,3,4]: Prof. Dr. Slavtcho Davidov, graduate of Leipzig – as head of Operative Dentistry (*Figure 1*); Prof. Dr. Georgi Stilyanov, graduate of Halle, as head of Prosthetic Dentistry (*Figure 2*) and Prof. Dr. Dimiter Svrakov, graduate of Freiburg as head of Conservative Dentistry (*Figure 3*).



Figure 1. Prof. Davidov



Figure 2. Prof. Stilyanov



Figure 3. Prof. Svrakov

Undoubtedly the three heads of departments applied in the new school what they knew best, i.e. the system of higher dental education in Germany. Therefore, the basis of the Bulgarian dental education has its roots in the odontologic system of education in Germany [8].

The new Bulgarian school integrated Bulgarian dentists, graduates of Universities abroad, who began working as lecturers, later acquired professorships, heads of departments and deans. Some of them are: Prof. Dr. B. Boyanov, Prof. Dr. M. Balabanov, Prof. Dr. Z. Koev, Prof. Dr. D. Stranski and many others [4,5].

The beginning is marked with a lot of hardships, related to finding premises, furnishing the latter, getting apparatuses, instruments, materials. Those hardships were keenly felt during II-nd World War and more particularly at the time of evacuation in 1943-44. They were gradually dealt with, thanks to the endeavors of many people.

The decision of the then government to admit without entrance exams University applicants that participated in the War brought to large numbers of students who enrolled in the courses. In 1944, 941 applicants were enrolled as students in the first year, whereas in 1945 – 1139 students (cursus magnus). This large number of students taking up dentistry is indicative of the social prestige of the dental profession [3].

In 1950 the Dental Department was renamed Stomatological in order to underline the increased and improved medical education and in 1951 it developed into the Faculty of Stomatology of the Medical Academy (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4



The old building of Dental Faculty

Although the term “Stomatology”, which in the EU is used for medical specialty, the education and training of dental practitioners nowadays is done by the odontological system, apart from the medicine and meet the requirements of Dental Directives of EU.

The Faculty of Stomatology is seated in a fourteen-storied building since 1975 (*Figure 5*). It enjoys modern facilities, needed in acquiring the profession of dentistry. There are two lecture halls, equipped with audio-visual devices with 274 and 264 seats; one lecture hall with 69 seats; the clinical halls with 240 working places; halls for pre-clinical training; phantom-halls; seminar-halls; a modern prosthetic laboratory; a library and a reading-room, seating 45 people (*Figure 6*). What counts most in our education is the ever-growing number of patients, thus enhancing the dental experience of the students.



Figure 5. Faculty of Stomatology, Sofia

Figure 6



.A phantom-hall

A new stage in the dental education in Bulgaria is the establishment of the second Faculty of Stomatology in Plovdiv in 1974 [6,7]. Today both faculties are within the Medical Universities, i.e. Sofia and Plovdiv. Both faculties consist of 8 departments: Dept. of Conservative Dentistry, Dept. of Periodontology and Diseases of Oral Mucosa, Dept. of Prosthodontics, Dept. of Orthodontics, Dept. of Pediatric Dentistry, Dept. of Social Medicine and Dental Public Health, Dept. of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Dept. of Maxillofacial Radiology and Oral Diagnostics. 122 lecturers work full-time at the Faculty of Stomatology, Sofia – among them is one academician, 8 professors, 14 associate-professors and 99 assistant-professors, whereas in the Faculty of Stomatology – Plovdiv there are 3 professors, 14 associate-professors and 74 assistant-professors.

The highly qualified teaching staff of both faculties manages to accomplish their basic priority most successfully, which is teaching, specializing and qualifying the dental practitioners.

Until the year of 2004, the Faculty of Stomatology, Sofia has admitted 13 901 students, 9 364 Bulgarian and 760 foreign-born students graduated. During the school-year of 2004/2005, 524 Bulgarian and 78 foreign-born students were doing their University studies. The large number of for-

eign students indicates the high recognition which our dental education enjoys abroad. Students from more than 51 countries, including Europe, Asia, Africa and America are graduates and undergraduates at the faculty in Sofia.

New students are admitted to both faculties after their high-school education and they are enrolled according to their average mark of the entrance exams in Chemistry and Biology and the high school marks in Chemistry and Biology. The number of admitted students is strictly determined (numerus clausus); the number of male and female is equal.

The length of education is 5 years (10 semesters) plus one year for pre-graduation training. The number of disciplines is 40 – 14 basic, 13 medical and 13 dental disciplines. For the school-year of 2004/05 the total number of hours in the curriculum is 4 985, 1645 hours for lectures and 3 340 hours for practical exercises; 2 115 hours for basic and medical disciplines and 2870 hours for dental disciplines. Apart from the obligatory subjects there are 10 optional subjects.

Teaching is carried out on the disciplinary manner. In school-year 2002/03 integrated practical education on prosthetic dentistry, conservative dentistry and parodontology was initiated in semesters IX and X and pre-graduation training.

Assessment of the acquired knowledge is done by exams – practical, theoretical, colloquia, tests and current marks. Graduates of Stomatology are expected to have sat successfully 40 exams at the end of the semesters and 6 state exams. The diploma entitles the holder to a Master's degree. Actually the diploma serves as a work license.

Bearing in mind our joining EU and the requirement to couple the titles and degrees with the Dental Directives of the EU, the title we have discussed and decided to confer to a graduate of dentistry is "Doctor of dental medicine".

In the near future with regards to synchronizing the higher education of dentistry in the EU and having in mind the recommendations of ADEE and DentEd, we intend to increase the number of optional

disciplines and introduce modules in the curriculum.

Soon the third Faculty of dentistry in Bulgaria – in Varna will be established.

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