

Comment from the DDHV in response to your article: 'Establishing dental hygiene education in Germany: current facts and future perspectives'

The following corrections need to be made concerning the above mentioned report, published in the last issue.

Munster is not the only programme that leads in a module-system training state recognized dental assistants to achieve the so called German title of 'Dental Hygienist'. As a matter of fact it began in 1994 in Stuttgart. So the statement: 'Structural dental hygiene education in Germany did not begin until 1999', is not correct.

It is also not correct that the purpose of the petition won in the German Parliament was to practice freelance dental hygiene in Germany. Freelance practice can be performed, and has been performed, without any problems since 1988. The purpose of the petition was to legalize the profession of Dental Hygiene, and therefore achieve state recognition. For this purpose, like in all countries worldwide, a new law is necessary. The establishment of this law is currently being deterred by the German Dental Board and the National Health Department.

In addition, this report leads one to understand, that the qualifying dental hygienists in this non-certified continuous education programme are 'board-certified'. This is not a state-recognized certificate, but only accepted by the Dental Board. It is not accepted in all German Bundesländern (States), or in any other foreign country. They are not licensed nor registered Dental Hygienists.

In addition, it is not correct, that the DDHV (Deutscher DentalhygienikerInnen Verband e.V.) had an advisory function when establishing the continuous education programs in Germany. The DDHV only played a minor part in very few meetings, where the DDHV made it clear that only a 1 year full-time educational programme could be accepted. Instead, we have a maximum 6 months educational programme which is unacceptable at an international level. The DDHV was informed about the outcome of these meetings but no actual involvement was allowed.

The fact is that Germany has in three Bundesländern (States) continuous educational programmes for dental

assistants, who refer to themselves as dental hygienists, only because the profession of the dental hygienist is not protected by law. But since 1 May 2004, a programme from Switzerland will allow these candidates to attend an additional educational programme that offers state recognition when passing the Swiss final examination. For this purpose, the final examination is conducted outside Germany, because an international examination (Diploma) is consistently refused in this country.

What is ignored in this matter is that internationally, for acceptance into dental hygiene programmes, students have to pass grade 12 or 13, or have a qualified 3-year education to be able to participate in a dental hygiene programme. With additional education related to continuous education programmes for dental assistants, the advanced education takes 1 year longer than the Dental Board (Chamber) offers via their Module System (maximum 950 h). This includes the presented Munster programme that allows their applicants to believe they have received an internationally recognized education. But it does not even offer a state recognized diploma.

Last, but not least, Germany presents its first authentic dental hygiene education in association with a Swiss school that will start in September 2004 in Munich. The school will accept trained dental assistants, as well as students with a final 13th grade for acceptance in a 3-year programme with international standards.

The rules and regulations, according to international standards for a legal profession, require a Diploma, whereas Germany does not differentiate in this matter compared with other countries worldwide.

It is a shame that three highly-qualified authors, who do not follow the exact German law, want to support the headstrong Zahnärztekammer (Dental Board). Germany tends to follow the incorrect sequence regarding our profession. It is obvious that this subject will not exist if one constantly opposes European opinion.

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