



EFP Guidelines for Seeking the Specialty in Periodontology

Dentistry as one of the health professions with clear educational standards has been reviewed in terms of its educational outcomes, the definition of the professional profiles and competences in the recent European Directives (2005). In this document, there is recognition to only two dental specialties – Orthodontics and Oral Surgery – and the established rights of specialist dentists. This directive, however, does not regulate the education and training of these specialties, nor the approval of further dental specialties. All these regulatory aspects are left to the discretion of the individual EU Member States. This creates the potential for heterogeneity in all aspects of dental specialties training and practice and poses a great difficulty in obtaining convergence of education and training and practice standards.

A *specialist dentist* is by definition a dentist trained beyond the level of general dental practitioner and authorized to practice as a clinician with advanced expertise in a branch of dentistry. A dental specialty has been defined as a nationally or internationally recognized branch of dental specialization for which a structured postgraduate training program exists. In October 2005, the European Parliament adopted a new EC directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. It replaced the previous sectoral directives, which were introduced in 1978, when the EU was far smaller. The new EC directive includes the educational requirements for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of the formal qualifications of dental (and various other health) practitioners.

As far as health specialties are concerned, the new EC directive states:

*“To allow for the characteristics of the qualification system for doctors and dentists and the related *acquis communautaire* in the area of mutual recognition, the principle of automatic recognition of medical and dental specialties common to at least two Member States should continue to apply to all specialties recognized on the date of adoption of this Directive. To simplify the system, however, automatic recognition should apply after the date of entry into force of this Directive only to those new medical specialties common to at least two fifths of Member States. Moreover, the Directive does not prevent Member States from agreeing amongst them on automatic recognition for certain medical and dental specialties common to them but not automatically recognized within the meaning of the Directive, according to their own rules. The automatic recognition will therefore, apply to those specialties formally recognized when the new directive comes into effect in the autumn of 2007”.*

This automatic process (the two-fifths rule), however, applies only to medical and not to dental specialties. This means that it will not be easy to add other common dental specialties to the current list of two (Orthodontics and Oral Surgery), and in order to add additional dental specialties, it will be necessary to obtain agreements between individual countries. This places dentistry in a more difficult situation than medicine, where as soon as a specialty is officially recognized in two-fifths of Member States, it can become a pan-EU/European Economic Area (EEA) specialty.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that these two recognized dental specialties were formally recognized by the EC in the old sectoral directives regulating the mutual recognition of professional qualifications for dentists, there are Member States from the EU/EEA (Spain) that still have not recognized even these dental specialties.

The specialties of Periodontics and Children's Dentistry, in spite of not being mentioned in the EC directive, are the next most commonly recognized by individual EU countries. According to the CECDO's database and the survey of dental competent authorities, Periodontology is recognized in 15 EU/EEA countries, although some important EU/EEA countries, such as Austria, Germany, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, do not formally recognize it. Most of these countries, however, notwithstanding the fact that there is no formal recognition of dental specialties and specialists, allow dentists to undergo formal taught postgraduate courses in Universities for up to 3 years' duration, allow dentists to limit their work to this specialty of dentistry and in some instances these dentists are allowed to claim to be specialists and treat patients referred by other dentists. Furthermore, they may even receive diplomas from their dental association or from specialist associations (National Societies of Periodontology).

The European Federation of Periodontology (EFP <http://www.efp.net/>) as the European umbrella organization representing all National Scientific Societies in Periodontology has approved as part of its mission to foster the formal recognition of Periodontology as a European Dental Specialty. In light of the legal difficulties to attain this recognition status at European Level, the EFP encourages the National Periodontal Societies to seek this recognition at their own national level in those countries still lacking this legal status.

Here are the main guidelines to pursue this process:

1) The Educational Program

In order to comply with the EC directives entrants to dental specialist training must have an EC-approved primary dental qualification (degree) and must carry out a formal specialist education in a structured postgraduate training program. This specialist-training program must last a minimum of 3 years full time (or part-time equivalent), must contain academic and clinical elements and must take place at 'institutions' approved by the competent authority in the country concerned. This implies that the National Society must first assure the existence of such a training program in their country.

The EFP has developed a model of such a program and there are currently 11 accredited dental schools providing this EFP-Postgraduate Program in Periodontology and this number increases every year. These accreditation systems, however, do not have a legal binding in most European countries and just provide a reference of peer-review quality assurance.

The EFP-Postgraduate Program in Periodontology is based on the EC directives' requirement of 3 years' full-time education comprising both academic and extensive clinical training. In spite of the fact that according to the Bologna Framework, Masters degree program normally carry 90–120 ECTS credits, the length and the content of a dental specialty training program needs to accommodate the provisions of specialty training as detailed in the EC directive (2005). As such, it should carry at least three full-time years or their part-time equivalent (180 ECTS credits), and therefore, the specialty status can only be obtained after completing both the academic component and the required clinical training. These provisions also comply with the recommendations by the Conference on Master-level Degrees organized by the European University Association under the auspices of the EU in Helsinki (Finland) in March 2003, which concluded that programs leading to a Masters degree may have 'different orientations and various profiles' in order to accommodate a diversity of academic and labor market needs.

This course, therefore, should be organized in three full-time years (6 semesters–40 weeks per year) comprising 180 ECTS. The academic content leading to an Academic Master Degree can be 120 ECTS, including the research presentation. The Specialty Certificate, however, can only be obtained after completing both the Academic Degree and the required clinical time (three years). Both the Academic Degree and the Specialty Certificate should be interlinked in such a manner that one cannot be obtained without the other.

The following is the list of currently approved EFP Graduate Programs in Periodontology:

1. Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2. University of Bern, Switzerland
3. University of Goteborg, Sweden
4. Jonkoping Institute for Post-graduate Dental Education, Sweden
5. Eastman Dental Institute London, UK
6. Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.
7. University Complutense Madrid, Spain
8. Hadassah Faculty of Dental Medicine Jerusalem,
9. Yeditepe University of Istanbul, Turkey
10. Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland
11. Haifa Medical Center, Israel

The National Societies seeking recognition should discuss with their respective governments whether this existing EFP post-graduate model could serve as the reference educational framework of specialist training in Periodontology in that particular country and which are the accreditation criteria for existing postgraduate programs in Periodontology.

1) The Periodontal Practice

In light of the heterogeneity of dental services in Europe and the lack of provision of specialized periodontal services by the public health systems of most European countries, there is not a European Profile of a Specialist in Periodontology in terms of professional competences. In fact there are different models available in those countries where Periodontology is currently a legally recognized specialty. There are countries where periodontal practice is not regulated and general dentists and specialists have similar legal competences (there is not a patient profile or a periodontal procedure that a general dentist cannot do) and similarly periodontologists are not obliged to limit their practice to Periodontology. On the other extreme there are countries where periodontologists are obliged to limit their practice to Periodontology and on the other hand the patient profile and periodontal procedures that can be treated by general dentists is also regulated and limited. There are also countries where the provision of certain periodontal services in the public health system is limited to specialist, but periodontal practice is not regulated in the private sector.

Those National Societies of Periodontology seeking for specialty recognition should discuss with their relevant government authorities which model of periodontal practice at specialty level adjusts better with the country legislation and the provision of oral health services.

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