Impact of Oral Health Education in Jamaica

Dr. Bob Fulton – Editor in Chief JADI

In the August 2016 edition of the JADI, I showcased Dr. Irving McKenzie (https://www.utech.edu.jm/academics/colleges-faculties/joint/contact-us) from Jamaica as receiving the National Award of Jamaica; the badge of honor for meritorious service, for his contributions to education and dentistry in developing a new dental school in Jamaica. In this editorial I’d like to elaborate a bit on that and explain to you exactly why this world-class gentleman deserves every bit of prestigious award. When you live in northeastern Ohio in the United States, like I do, when Dr. McKenzie asks you in the dead of winter to go to Jamaica for four days and speak on your favorite topics of sugar and metabolic health, I didn’t have to think twice before accepting that invitation.

I had no idea what to expect when I got off the plane in Kingston Jamaica that was met by Bunny, my greeter, guide and driver. My experience with dental schools and oral health training in that part of the world had been limited to Peru and Cuba, and since Jamaica has been referred to, by some, as a third world nation, due to the rather inequitable wealth distribution in the country, I really wasn’t sure what to expect from my experience at the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech), College of Oral Health Sciences.

With a dentist to patient ratio of 17,000 –1 the UTech College of Oral Health Sciences is a significant contributor to oral health knowledge and practice in Jamaica, through the training of individuals for the dental workforce, as well as providing strong pro-bono voluntary community dental works services. Their students are exposed to the application of theoretical and practical real world approaches to dentistry, which provides them with a broad perspective of their role as dental health professionals in this developing country with huge oral health needs. The college offers a Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry, DMD, as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in programs such as
dental laboratory technology, dental nurse therapy, and dental hygiene. Additionally the college offers diploma status in dental assisting, and expanded functions. All students finishing the DMD program are tested using the same NERB testing board that many dental schools in the USA use and there is a 95% success rate.

From a personal perspective my two presentations on “Oral Disease, Metabolic Syndrome, and Aging” in the AM to the students, and “Oral Disease and Diabetes” in the evening to the student/faculty and public were just ok... because I found that much of what I was imparting to these, well educated and informed people was already common knowledge within their extensive curriculum and public knowledge. Topics such as oral disease and it’s relation to sugar, inflammation, diabetes, heart disease, aging, drugs, etc., etc., had been thoroughly covered in their previous course work and general publications for the public. From a public level, the work of Prof. Errol Morrison, (http://www.ehfjamaica.com/pages/professor-the-hon-errol-morrison) former President of U Tech and President of the Diabetes Association of Jamaica has been outstanding in presenting the negative effects of sugar and diabetes to the general population of Jamaica, and the rest of the world. I will have much to learn from this humble man.

But it was within their oral health clinic, that I was truly humbled, by the extensive work up a student was required to present about a patient before the preceptor allowed even basic treatment to begin. Students were required to present a health history of all patients, which included an extensive medical H & P, Full Dental H & P, and complete treatment plan for the patient, including the course of action for the requested treatment of the day. I had the opportunity to ask several questions to the students and observe their skill levels. It was here in the clinic that the true quality of their knowledge shown forth. It is my opinion that these students equaled, or exceeded, those of other older and more prestigious dental schools worldwide. This is a dental school model for the future, it’s not based on typodonts or manikins, or computer generated design, it’s based on real students, treating real patients, getting real
results in solving a problem of oral health in Jamaica and perhaps the rest of the Caribbean.

*ACTIONS* in this world get results, not just words or meetings. Dr Irving McKenzie and Professor Morrison are truly men of action and few words!!

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