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The Newcastle-Indiana Experience: A Transatlantic Educational Initiative for Dental Students

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ABSTRACT BODY:

Objectives: To design and pilot a unique educational initiative and exchange programme for dental students at Newcastle University (NUSoD, UK) and Indiana University (IUSD, USA) involving e-learning, reflection and community-based oral health education (OHE). This study explores participants' views on the perceived benefits of participation.

Methods: In 2015, IUSD and NUSoD began designing a unique, hybrid, experiential learning initiative. In early 2016, the first cohort of 6 IUSD and 6 NUSoD students were recruited and they began a semester-long videoconferencing course. Webinars and CourseNetworking (theCN) were used to facilitate student-centred learning. In May 2016, the first exchange occurred with IUSD students visiting NUSoD. Students observed clinics at Newcastle Dental Hospital and they attended community settings alongside NUSoD students to deliver OHE to diverse groups across Newcastle upon Tyne. A series of focus groups with students (pre and post educational experience) and faculty (post educational experience) were audio-recorded. A qualitative grounded theory approach was applied to explore emergent themes. Documentary analysis of students' written reflections added further insight.

Results: Preliminary analysis shows themes focusing upon students' identifying similarities and differences in undergraduate dental curricula and their preferences for different modes of learning. Students' interest was drawn to the different health care systems involved and their potential links with barriers and motivators for patients accessing dental care. Students reported greater confidence in their communication skills following their delivery of OHE to diverse community groups.

Conclusions: Students and faculty described this initiative as an exciting, dynamic and engaging educational experience. This initiative has not only widened students' awareness of OHE and oral health policy, it has also enabled collaborative working with those who they genuinely hope will become lifelong colleagues and friends. Further evaluation of this educational initiative is needed to continue exploring how faculty and staff can foster a participatory learning model.

KEYWORDS: Dental Education, International educational exchange, Qualitative Research, Health policy, Dental health education.

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