

ORIGINAL

Strategy for improving the work of tutors in workplace education in dentistry

Estrategia para perfeccionar la labor del tutor en la educación en el trabajo en Estomatología

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the role of the tutor in the comprehensive training of future health professionals is one of the methodological lines of work that has been developed over several academic years to improve the teaching process.

Objective: to design a strategy to improve the work of tutors in the Stomatology degree program.

Method: qualitative research was conducted to design a working methodology with the aim of improving the performance and development of the teaching staff as tutors in this teaching activity. Theoretical and empirical methods were used, such as surveys and document analysis, taking into account the provisions of the regulations and governing documents of Higher Education in Medical Sciences.

Results: the presence of a novice faculty was found, composed mainly of instructors with limited experience as tutors. The difficulties observed may influence the acquisition of skills and habits in stomatological practice that are intended to be achieved by graduates of the Stomatology program.

Conclusions: the strategy designed constituted a teaching tool to guide tutors in their educational work and to strive for excellence in the training processes of the Stomatology Degree Program.

Keywords: Stomatology; Tutor; Professors; Students; Education at Work; Professional Skills.

RESUMEN

Introducción: las funciones del tutor en la formación integral de los futuros profesionales de la salud es una de las líneas de trabajo metodológico que se ha desarrollado durante varios cursos para perfeccionar el proceso docente educativo.

Objetivo: diseñar una estrategia para perfeccionar la labor del tutor en la educación en el trabajo de la carrera de Estomatología.

Método: se realizó una investigación cualitativa para el diseño de una metodología de trabajo con el propósito de lograr un mejor desenvolvimiento y desarrollo del claustro de profesores como ejemplo de tutores en esta actividad docente. Se utilizaron métodos teóricos y empíricos como encuesta y análisis documental, considerando lo establecido en las normativas y documentos rectores de la Enseñanza Superior en las Ciencias Médicas.

Resultados: se constató la presencia de un claustro novel integrado en su mayoría por profesores instructores

con limitada experiencia como tutores. Las dificultades observadas pueden influir en la adquisición de habilidades y hábitos en la práctica estomatológica que se pretenden lograr en el egresado de la carrera de Estomatología.

Conclusiones: la estrategia diseñada constituyó un instrumento didáctico para orientar al tutor en su labor educativa y trabajar por el logro de la excelencia en los procesos formativos de la Carrera de Estomatología.

Palabras clave: Estomatología; Tutor; Profesores; Estudiantes; Educación en el Trabajo; Habilidades Profesionales.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the tutor in the comprehensive training of future health professionals is one of the methodological lines of work that has been developed over several academic years in order to improve the educational teaching process.⁽¹⁾

Tutoring is a very ancient practice that has been of great importance throughout the ages, since Greece and Rome, where the term was used and young people were prepared at different stages of their education.⁽²⁾

The figure of the tutor has its roots in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, in figures such as Socrates (469-399 BC), Plato, and Aristotle. The term tutor is defined as the person responsible for the guardianship of someone else. It comes from the Latin tutor, which refers to the role of defending, guarding, preserving, sustaining, and helping. A tutor is an advisor, a guide, and a superior.⁽²⁾

In higher education: it originated at the Open University in England and the National University of Distance Education in Spain, which attempted to adapt open university systems in 1982.⁽³⁾

The role of the tutor is fundamental to the training of medical students. Their dedication and training largely determine the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and responsibilities necessary to effectively perform their role and the degree of student satisfaction within the educational process. The successful performance of the tutor will also depend on the efficient achievement of the triad: medical care, teaching, and research, in addition to meeting the requirements of being educational leaders and possessing a high level of professionalism.⁽⁴⁾

The tutor is a university professor with certain levels of pedagogical professionalism. They must have a basic knowledge of the discipline in which the student is involved; of the organization and rules of the institution; of the current curriculum; of the academic difficulties of the students; and of the activities and resources available at the institution to support the academic regularization of the students and promote their teaching performance.⁽⁴⁾

In Cuba, the goal of education is the comprehensive training of the individual and personalized attention. Therefore, tutoring is the cornerstone of educational practice that contributes to achieving the concept of quality in today's universities.⁽⁵⁾

There are legal provisions established by the Higher Education System regarding the work of tutors. The Ministry of Higher Education issued Resolution 47 of 2022, which governs the Organizational Regulations for the Teaching Process and the Direction of Teaching and Methodological Work for University Degrees, establishing in Article 158.1 the work of tutors:⁽⁶⁾

- The tutor is a member of the academic year group. They are educators who are responsible for integrating the system of educational influences present in the different areas of the student's personal development, providing academic and research advice, as well as the necessary support for decision-making, making their role essential in the harmonious development of the student.⁽⁶⁾
- The personalized attention they give to students in the process of managing information and knowledge and in acquiring the skills necessary for the successful development of their learning process is essential.⁽⁶⁾
- For the tutor's work to be effective, in addition to having adequate scientific and professional training, they must have psycho-pedagogical training that allows them to identify the academic and educational needs of the students they serve and to carry out the appropriate personalized actions.⁽⁶⁾

Education in the workplace is the main form of teaching organization, and its fundamental objective is to contribute to and reinforce knowledge and the formation of skills, practical habits, and the development and reinforcement of values (responsibility, humanism, solidarity, hard work), in which tutors play a fundamental role.⁽⁷⁾

The acquisition of the most advanced working methods and the development of the traits that make up their personality contribute to consolidating, expanding, and applying the knowledge acquired during the educational teaching process, hence the importance of the tutor's preparation in this activity, where a significant number of hours are programmed within the students' curriculum design.⁽⁷⁾

The educational task requires providing credible information, establishing a direct relationship between what is learned or known and what is felt and aspired to, preparing each citizen in KNOWING HOW TO DO AND KNOWING HOW TO BE.⁽⁸⁾

In order to achieve excellence in the educational process, teachers are a very important link and require genuine improvement and the acquisition of teaching skills that are in line with the times.⁽⁹⁾

Tutors must fulfill their assigned duties and be present at every stage of the student's education, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Their work is as complex as other educational tasks performed by teachers with greater experience and academic and scientific standing.⁽¹⁰⁾

Tutoring is the best opportunity to establish relationships of trust and closeness between the tutor and the student, to reinforce their self-esteem and personal security. It is also a great opportunity to encourage students to think for themselves and find solutions to problems or difficulties that arise. However, it is essential that tutors demonstrate human values such as simplicity, modesty, and humanism, that is, that they set an example as teachers.^(2,3,4)

Dental clinics are the primary settings for the training of future health professionals, which is why it is important to prepare and train all tutors to transform the dental chair into a basic cell of tutoring.⁽¹¹⁾

Despite efforts to prepare tutors and monitor teaching activities through visits and inspections, difficulties have been observed in relation to the methodology used by tutors in workplace education. This hinders the promotion of knowledge, skills, and values in the training of future health professionals, where the tutor undoubtedly plays an important role as the leader of the activity.

Based on this premise, the present study was conducted with the purpose of designing a strategy to improve the work of tutors in work-based education in the Dentistry program.

METHOD

Qualitative research was conducted during the 2023-2024 period to design a working methodology aimed at improving the performance and development of the teaching staff as tutors in the Stomatology Degree Program.

Theoretical and empirical methods such as surveys and document analysis were used, taking into account the provisions of the regulations and governing documents of Higher Education in Medical Sciences.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the strategy.

Objectivity: the general aspects to be taken into account for the development of Education in the Workplace in the Dentistry Degree Program originate from the results of the applied diagnosis and the training needs of the tutors, who will greatly contribute to the development and improvement of the Teaching Process.

Contextualized nature: each tutor will have the opportunity to adapt and interact according to the contexts in which they work.

Flexibility: each tutor will be able to make changes to the structure according to the individual differences of each student, the location, their purposes, and priorities.

Personological: the strategy was designed and developed in accordance with the needs of the teaching staff, based on the teaching they provide in this form of teaching organization.

Integrative: This strategy demonstrates the importance of integrating and interrelating the knowledge and experience of all the tutors of the different subjects in the clinical cycle. We believe that each criterion enriches the quality of the process and its development, as well as promoting knowledge, skills, and values in the training of future health professionals, where the tutor undoubtedly plays an important role as the leader of the activity.

Stages of strategy development

First stage

Theoretical methods were used to conduct a documentary review of the curriculum, methodological guidelines, resolutions, recommendations set out in each Control Report on the teaching activity of the tutor specifically in this form of teaching organization. As an empirical method, a survey was conducted among 21 tutors belonging to the universalization of education in the municipality of Pinar del Río, which allowed information to be gathered on their preparation and their potential and priorities. It was found that the teaching staff was inexperienced, consisting mainly of instructor teachers with little experience as tutors. However, all of them are first-degree specialists and more than 50 % hold a master's degree. They have not received any courses, workshops, or training on this type of teaching, and they were unaware of the functions of the tutor teacher, as well as the fundamental aspects to be taken into account for the development of Education in the Workplace.

Given the difficulties in the work of the tutor and how to proceed to carry it out with the best quality, a strategy was designed that will greatly help in the development and improvement of the Educational Teaching

Process.

Second stage

Methodological design of the strategy.

1. Comprehensive organization of the activity so that it meets its objectives for the student.
2. The tutor must first introduce and guide the student in the activities specific to their professional activity and the content to be covered, always teaching them how to conduct themselves professionally in accordance with bioethical principles and ethical standards.

1. Introduction

- Warm greetings.
- Attendance check (in accordance with the university's educational and ideological work strategy).
- Politicization, anniversaries, or important events that mark local, regional, national, or international history.
- Independent study monitoring: control questions are asked, quantitatively evaluated, and discussed through a comprehensive summary.
- Compliance with curriculum strategies (can be demonstrated at any time during the teaching activity).

2. Motivation

- What will be done? How will it be done? Which patients will be treated? This can be developed through problem-solving or health issues (group discussion).
- The objectives are defined or stated.
- Teaching algorithm: must include the knowledge, skills, and habits to be worked on.

3. Development

- Analysis by students of professional skills: group discussion of skills cards (based on what they have achieved so far, what they still need to achieve, and what they are going to accomplish on that day).
- At this point, the student will move on to patient care, positioning the patient in the chair, and following the professional procedures of the dentist.
- The dental assistant and/or the dental hygienist will provide the instruments, accessories, and materials to be used in the work session; they will also help fill out the charge sheet, an essential epidemiological tool for assessing the current health situation in each health area. The teacher observes and notes what the student does, paying special attention to individual differences, clarifying at the right moment, reviewing each step taken by the student, and correcting as necessary. The teacher will ensure the doctor-patient relationship and carry out health promotion and prevention activities.
- Evaluative teaching control of procedures.
- Throughout the activity, teaching principles, mastery of content, training, and the acquisition and development of professional skills will be taken into account.
- Training and development of values that flow into the development of the class: professional, political-ideological, informed consent, ethics, and bioethics.
- Health promotion and prevention.
- Research tasks.
- Psychological therapeutic work (iatrogenic effects).
- Certain specific features of each subject will be taken into account.

4. Conclusions

The teacher will meet with their students in order to assess their learning, take any necessary measures, evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the activity, and assess the degree to which the educational and instructional objectives of the activity have been met.

A comprehensive summary will be made of:

Completion of tasks

- Analysis of the difficulties, shortcomings, and successes encountered individually and generally during the class.
- Progress in learning.
- Guidance, correction, and further study.
- Closing of the problem that could be used for motivation.
- Self-assessment by students.

- Completion of quantitative assessments on the skills card and qualitative assessments in the teacher's work log, reflecting difficulties in their competence and performance.
- Teaching tasks: Independent study. Pay special attention to individual differences.
- Provide a bibliography. Take into account the basic, supplementary, and reference bibliography. Recommend the study of scientific and technical materials, preferably in English, on which students will eventually give an oral presentation or write a summary.
- Guide and motivate the next teaching activity.

Third stage

Evaluation of the impact achieved with the implementation of the strategy.

The results of these actions made it possible to evaluate the impact of the strategy, which was evident in the following aspects:

- Training for tutors in their daily work.
- Improved theoretical and methodological preparation in this form of teaching organization, which has had a positive impact on student learning.
- As a methodology, it has had a significant effect, as it serves as a guide for tutors in their educational guidance of dentistry students, helping them to achieve excellence in the training process.
- The results obtained in the design of the strategy were verified in inspections and controls planned in the methodological work plan, where 100 % of the teachers surveyed obtained satisfactory results.

DISCUSSION

According to Domínguez Urdanivia⁽²⁾, it should be noted that, in the work of the tutor, knowledge is in a constant process of construction and refinement, equally for both parties, that is, the teacher who takes on this role and the student.

Sometimes, the tutor's experience is limited, as each student being tutored has a different performance level and subject of study, which represents a challenge and the acquisition of new knowledge for both parties.

The tutor should set the following objectives: to encourage communication, thinking, and execution in order to strengthen the bond with the student in terms of teaching and work performance. That is why it is important to establish teaching and prevention strategies to achieve a graduate profile in line with the precepts established by the Ministry of Higher Education.⁽⁴⁾

Among the most common difficulties observed in students are the techniques, methods, and procedures they must use and contextualize to the intended subject matter. On the other hand, it is considered essential for tutors to be familiar with research methods in order to guide and monitor the work of their tutees individually, evaluate their achievements, and accompany them until they obtain the expected results.⁽⁵⁾

Vila Pérez⁽¹⁰⁾, in his study, mentions the numerous challenges that hinder the performance of tutors. Among these difficulties, the lack of time available for this role is frequently mentioned, especially when there are several students being tutored. Most of them take on various academic, administrative, or research responsibilities that conspire against the proper development of tutoring.

Vázquez Carvajal et al.⁽¹²⁾ in a similar study conducted in Ciego de Ávila, highlight the importance of the role of the tutor as a key factor in the training—both pedagogical and clinical—of a student who demonstrates the necessary skills to perform their duties. They add that in order to define a professional as competent, they must possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to perform their profession successfully.

Professional training is a complex process in which individual potential must reflect initiative, flexibility, and autonomy, according to the characteristics demanded by each scenario, based on the integration of knowledge, skills, motivation, and values that define efficient, ethical, and humanistic professional performance.

Today's society demands changes that translate into the improvement of higher education, whose mission is to train professionals who are prepared to promote economic and social development, where the quality of teaching and the performance of the tutor as a guide to the substantive processes that take place in educational institutions play a key role.⁽¹⁾

In the complex scenario in which teaching takes place, it is essential to strengthen the teaching, research, didactic, and methodological skills of teachers, especially those who, as tutors, contribute to the formation of knowledge and skills while transmitting values and behaviors to their students.⁽²⁾

It is therefore concluded that the strategy designed constituted a teaching tool to guide tutors in their educational work and to strive for excellence in the training processes of the Dentistry Degree Program.

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