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Student Professionalism: Calibration of Dental School Assessors

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Background

Professionalism is an essential competency for any Dental Practitioner. Health care regulators such as the Dental Council of Ireland have a Code of Practice relating to Professional Behaviour and Ethical Conduct and its principles apply to clinical dental students (who treat patients under supervision) at Cork University Dental School and Hospital (CUDSH). During training, there is an expectation of undergraduate students (UG) that they demonstrate the same professional values during their clinical placements as would be expected post-qualification. Until 2015, the only mechanism whereby professionalism was formally assessed was through a clinical grading system by Clinical Staff who were dentists:

- Clinical Alert Significant negative event requiring immediate action
- Grade 1/2 Development required
- Grade 3/4 Confirmatory advice or intervention required
- Grade 5/6 Exceeds expectation

In 2015, a Professionalism Traffic Light System (Taylor & Grey, BDJ 2015) was introduced into CUDSH to allow all members of the Dental Team (Dental Nurses, Dental Receptionists, Laboratory and Administrative Staff etc.) to report professionalism issues; a scheme which is an addition to the previous grading scheme:

- RED CARD – Serious concern
- YELLOW CARD – Minor concern
- GREEN CARD – Positive/highly professional

As with the implementation of any new protocol/system, there were initial concerns over consistency and objectivity of the assessors. Some confusion arose as to which reporting scheme should be used for each circumstance. A staff training / calibration event was necessary to ensure that staff across CUDSH were calibrated in the assessment and reporting mechanism of professionalism of clinical dental students.

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Develop a series of professionalism scenarios and survey existing undergraduate students on how those scenarios should be assessed and reported by staff within CUDSH
2. Using the same professionalism scenarios, a range of staff assessors were surveyed on how those scenarios should be assessed and reported by staff within CUDSH as part of a calibration event

Results

A total of 13 professionalism scenarios were developed with 3 examples shown in Figure 1 below. Each scenario included an event, the grade/position of the individual observing the event and the environment in which the event took place:

Figure 1. Three examples of the thirteen professionalism-based scenarios used in the calibration session

Example Scenarios	
5	A student is too embarrassed to ask their patient if there is a chance that they are pregnant prior to a radiograph being taken, hopes that the radiographer will ask instead.
6	A student takes a photo of their patient and posts it to social media, the chart and CDS/Hospital number are visible in the background. A Hospital Administrator notices the image on Social Media.
12	A tutor notices that a student's attendance is poor. Every time that the student is due to assist their colleague, the student is absent and the student only attends when they are the 'active clinician'.

Figure 2 below summarises the responses to the 13 professionalism scenarios by the Undergraduates (UG; n=30), Clinical Staff (CS; n=12) and Non-clinical staff (N-CS; n=36). The use of the Professionalism Traffic Light System for UG and CS was 57.4% and 60% respectively but was used by N-CS in 74.3% of scenarios.

Figure 2. Comparison of percentage responses given by Undergraduates, Clinical Staff and Non-clinical Staff.

Response	Undergraduate Students (n=30)	Clinical Staff (n=12)	Non-clinical Staff (n=36)
Traffic Light Reporting System	57.4%	60%	74.3%
Red Card	29.0%	31.6%	46.7%
Yellow Card	21.3%	20.7%	20.1%
Green Card	7.2%	7.7%	7.6%
Clinical Grading System	37.4%	34.8%	24.4%
Clinical Alert	21.0%	12.3%	11.2%
Clinical Score 1-6	16.4%	22.6%	13.2%
No Card and No Further Action	5.1%	5.2%	1.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

N-CS awarded Red cards more frequently (46.7%) than UG (29.0%) or CS (31.6%) and were least likely to take no further action.

Conclusions

This study developed a series of 13 professionalism scenarios for consideration by undergraduate students to gain an insight into their perception of professionalism and its reporting mechanism within CUDSH. The scenarios and the UG responses were then used at a staff training/calibration event at CUDSH. The results highlighted a high level of agreement between undergraduate dental students and Clinical Staff. Non-clinical staff were more likely to assign a professionalism card from the Traffic Light Reporting System. In instances where the scenario was an example of poor professionalism, the N-CS were more likely to award a Red Card as compared with the UG and CS. Calibration sessions such as the one used in this study provide the opportunity to discuss professionalism, how professionalism should be assessed and reported as well as providing an insight into student perceptions of professionalism standards. The results of this study support the value of staff assessor calibration events within Dentistry and the Traffic Light Scheme may also be of value to other healthcare disciplines to improve the assessment and reporting of professionalism during clinical placements.

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Method



- A survey of 13 professionalism-based scenarios was administered to the fifth year BDS class (n=30 completed) at CUDSH using an online submission platform via Google Forms.



- During a staff training seminar the same 13 scenarios were presented to CUDSH departmental staff members and competency graders (Clinical Staff n=12; Non-Clinical Staff n=36) followed by discussion of the majority student responses.



- Data from the Calibration Session was collected via Google Forms submission
- The data is reported as absolute values and percentages