

Submission
No 165

INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

Organisation:

Name: Professor N A Jacques

Telephone:

Date Received: 15/06/2005

Theme:

Summary

SOCIAL ISSUES COM

15 JUN 2005

RECEIVED

The Inquiry into Dental Services
The Standing Committee on Social Issues
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

11 June 2005

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: The Inquiry by The Standing Committee on Social Issues into Dental Health

As a citizen of NSW who has been involved in oral health research my entire profession life, I wish to raise some issues that may be pertinent to your inquiry. Others can speak more authoritatively about the limitations to patient service within the NSW dental service.

(1) One thing is clear. Additional funding is desperately needed to support the NSW public dental health service. Any future increase in monies that may result from this inquiry must be clearly earmarked to meet the dental needs of the NSW public for which they are allocated. Whether all monies currently allocated to dental services reach their intended patient pool is a moot point.

(2) The Faculty of Dentistry at The University of Sydney has been in the red (on paper at least) for most of the last decade. The full-time staff that have remained to weather this storm are overworked and frustrated. The College structure does not empower the Dean with any latitude other than to comply with the financial (and political) restrictions imposed from on high on the Faculty. Lack of appropriate funds for expansion is hardly commensurate with addressing the shortage of trained dental clinicians. As you are no doubt aware, this will reach a critical level in four to five years. Education of new dentists is suffering. Lack of opportunity to gain knowledge from expert academics has been a consequence of the post-graduate degree course in many disciplines, while opportunities for relevant research are virtually non-existent. History shows that such conditions give rise to an ill-informed profession and will result in a lack of appropriately trained experts to fill vacated academic posts in the future. That future is now upon us. All of us will have to bear the consequences of this lack of planning as we grow old, irrespective of whether one accesses public or private dental services in NSW.

(3) New fashions in education based on tight fiscal policies have taken precedence over quality and rigour. For instance, recently imposed clinical rotation of fourth year dental students between Westmead Centre for Oral Health and the Sydney Dental Hospital may be rationalized as an educational experience, but are more likely motivated by the need to provide low cost items-of-service. Understaffing within the Faculty, and reliance on volunteers, makes clinical teaching at the two teaching hospitals unsustainable. This has been clear for many years and needs to be rectified as a matter of priority. Consideration should also be given to a two year internship upon graduation with rural rotation sponsored by appropriately vetted mentors.

(4) All aspects of dental research are ill funded in NSW. Only in Victoria has there been a concerted effort to address this problem. Dental research is the poor cousin to medical research and therefore suffers from lack of support from National granting bodies such as the NHMRC. I speak from experience. While the NHMRC has so far failed to fund aspects of my research, the National

Institutes of Health in the USA has had no such qualms despite a background of increased competitiveness for funds in the USA itself. NHMRC's own data show that if the ratio of dental services as a proportion of total medical costs were the basis of relative funding for dental research, then dental research should be funded to a far greater extent. Historically, dental research has made major contributions to the fields of epidemiology, immunology, microbiology and science. This research has not only impacted positively on oral health but has laid the foundation for ongoing research in many fields of medicine and science from which we all currently benefit.

Oral health is an integral part of a healthy body. It can no longer be viewed as a separate entity to good medical practice. NSW can show leadership in this area and, by embracing an holistic approach to health, develop an integrated approach to education, research, clinical practice and service to meet the dental needs of the community.

May I wish you well with your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'N. A. Jacques', with a long, sweeping underline.

(Prof) N A Jacques