

# Orthodontics around the world

## SPECIAL ARTICLE

### Orthodontics in Spain—at the Crossroads

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It is courage the world needs, not infallibility; courage is always the surest wisdom.  
(Sir Wilfred Grenfell.)

Dentistry, like so many other aspects of Spanish life, is at a critical turning point as the twenty first century—only 3 years ahead—approaches. Many important decisions and actions will have to be taken in an ever-escalating period of national professional change.

It is generally accepted amongst the Spanish profession that dental specialities are needed. Orthodontics is also considered in Spain as the vanguard speciality in Dentistry. It is almost an accepted fact that Orthodontics will be the first dental speciality to be officially recognised. However, when it came to the formal institutional support for its approval, the representative body of the dental profession, the 'Consejo General de Colegios de Odontólogos y Estomatólogos de España' as recently as 30 April, 1997, and very much to the temporary dismay of Spanish orthodontists ruled against the introduction of specialities in Dentistry in Spain. The chief explanation that was offered was that the establishment of specialities would restrict the field of activity of the general dental practitioner in those particular areas which were to become subject of specialization.

Spanish dentistry has undergone significant changes in the last decade or two. Not much is known about them outside of Spain. An overview of dentistry in Spain provides a better understanding of the relative positions taken, since inevitably there is considerable disagreement over the issue of specialisation, with each side believing that their 'point of view' is the only one that is properly substantiated.

#### Educational Background

The history of dental education in Spain goes back to 1901 when odontology was formally introduced. In the original odontological curriculum, the first 2 years of education were taken by basic human biological sciences and the third by dental studies. In 1910, the dental component of the curriculum was increased by 1 year, extending the whole of the educational process to 4 years. In the 1940s it was lengthened to 5 years as the teaching of basic biological and medical sciences was also increased by a year.

It was not until 1948 that a major change in dental education occurred in Spain, when odontology was transformed into stomatology. At the time it became the first medical speciality of any kind in the country with a prop-

erly regulated university curriculum. Over a period of 47 years (1901–1948) dental education underwent its most significant period of change, moving from 2 years of medical education to 6, and from 1 to 2 years of specific dental training. The process of 'medicalization' of dental education in Spain had materialized. Since then, the dependence on medicine has been complete and the 'medical spirit' in Spanish dentistry has prevailed to the present time, despite subsequent developments.

In 1986, dental education underwent another profound change. The Spanish Government reintroduced Odontology to comply with the EEC Dental Directives of 1978. This coincided with Spain joining the European Union, making Odontology a university course totally independent from Medicine.

#### Dental Schools

When Odontology was introduced in 1901 a Dental Department was created in the Faculty of Medicine in Madrid. It was there that the education and training of the new graduates took place. Subsequent to the Dental Act of 1910 a proper School of Odontology was set up in 1914, and incorporated within the premises and the academic structure of the same Faculty of Medicine.

In 1945 the new School of Odontology was inaugurated, later to be transformed into the School of Stomatology, as the medical speciality came into being in 1948. It remained the only Dental School for the whole of Spain until 1971 when the second one opened in Barcelona. During 1978 and the following years, Schools of Stomatology were established in Bilbao, Valencia, Oviedo, Sevilla, Santiago and Granada.

As the Dental Act of 1986, reintroducing Odontology in Spain to comply with EEC Directives, came into force the realignment of the Dental Schools followed a tripartite model. Barcelona and Madrid determined to have Faculties of Odontology totally independent from the Medical Faculties; Bilbao, Granada, Murcia (newly established), Santiago, Sevilla and Valencia resolved to follow the mixed model of Faculties of Medicine and Odontology. Finally, Oviedo decided to remain the only School of Stomatology in the country.

In 1995, two private Faculties of Odontology were officially authorised by the Spanish government for Madrid. Their need was questioned by the dental profession and the dental faculties, for reasons that follow.

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## Dental Manpower

Traditionally, there had been an insufficient number of dentists in Spain in relation to the dental needs of the population. However, important efforts have been made over the last decade to improve the dental manpower planning that was lacking previously. To illustrate the situation the following official data is provided: in 1970 for a population of 33-956-376 there were 1-794 dentists (1/18-928 ratio). In 1995, for a population of 39-435-000, which had only increased 14-03 per cent over a 25-year period, the number of dentists had multiplied by seven times from 1-794 to 14-012 registered practitioners! The current ratio is 1 dentist to 2-814 people. A major contribution to this change has been the arrival in Spain of 'dentists' holding dental diplomas granted in some Central and South American countries.

The dental intake of dental students to State Universities in Spain in 1997 was 546 (526 to the Faculties of Odontology and 20 to the School of Stomatology). However, in 1995 the first private Faculty of Odontology opened in Madrid, taking 200 new dental students (C.E.S. University), to be followed by a second private one in 1996 (Universidad Alfonso X el Sabio), which took 354 dental students. It should be noted that both private faculties are currently training in Madrid almost as many dental students as the whole of the rest of the state faculties in the remainder of the country (534 to 546) . . . and yet more private schools are being contemplated!

Understandably, all this has led to an over supply of dentists, significant competition between practices and to cases of dental unemployment for the first time in the history of Spanish dentistry. It is within the described context that the ruling of the Spanish General Dental Council (Consejo General de Colegios de Odontólogos y Estomatólogos de España) against the introduction of specialities in Dentistry must be considered.

## The Road towards Specialization

When referring to specialization in Dentistry in Spain it must be remembered that the dental professional is made up of Stomatologists and Odontologists, almost on a '50/50' basis. It must also be borne in mind that stomatology is already a medical speciality of its own right since 1948.

The title of 'specialist' in Medicine is regulated by the Royal Decree 127/1984 which structures specialised medical education and the access to the title of Medical Specialist. The Ministry of Education of Spain is the competent authority to issue the corresponding specialists titles. The Royal Decree only recognises Stomatology and Maxillofacial Surgery as medical specialities and in no way recognises Orthodontics or the other dental specialities. It should be noted that there are no provisions in Spanish law for further specialization based on an already officially recognized medical speciality. This is due to that fact the speciality of orthodontics cannot be built on the foundations of a stomatological degree, which is a specialist title already. However, to comply with EC Dental Directives, Orthodontics will soon have to be established in Spain as a Speciality of Odontology, to implement Directives 78/686/EEC and 78/687/EEC. This will also be the case

with Oral Surgery, a dental speciality independent from Maxillofacial surgery and a medical speciality in its own right in our country. The necessary process will be achieved through the promulgation of the appropriate Royal Decrees. At that stage Spain will report to the European Union that it has satisfied the European regulations, by arranging appropriate 3 years specialist training programmes and by introducing a dental specialists register.

In the meantime, some Spanish universities, taking advantage of a Law called University Reform (LRU), of 11/1983, have arbitrated the formula of issuing University 'Own Titles' which is a different type of academic postgraduate accreditation altogether. Some of these university 'own titles' lead to some confusion with other titles of higher rank by the very nature of their respective denominations. Into this category fall the diplomas recently awarded by the School of Stomatology of the University of Oviedo: 'Stomatologist University Specialist in Orthodontics'. The university 'own titles' are being granted by Rectors of universities following the guidance of each postgraduate course director. On the other hand, specialists titles regulated by 'Royal Decree' are granted by the King of Spain and in His name, by the Rector of the corresponding university.

The Universities 'own titles' do not have either proper recognition or validity (academic nor professional) in all of the national territory, nor do they authorise the practice of any particular speciality. They only provide evidence of some form of postgraduate education to further the knowledge of university licentiates.

The universities 'own titles' are of three kinds: 'Master', 'Specialist', and 'Expert'. It should be noted that the specialist ranks between the master and the university expert diplomas, grading in fact closer to the latter.

## Official Recognition, How and When?

In the prevailing situation there is no option other than to wait until the Advisory Committee on the Training of Dental Practitioners in the European Union approves the document on 'Proficiencies for two specialist categories: orthodontics and oral surgery' elaborated by the Working Group. That shall lead, in our opinion, to the issuing from Brussels to all EU countries where these specialities are not recognised, of a 'letter of notice' to abide by EC Regulations. That will be the only way for the Spanish government to establish Dental Specialities in Spain, and thus override the current Spanish General Dental Council position.

Obviously, the introduction of Dental Specialities in Spain would incorporate a 'grandparenting' clause, for a limited period of time after the creation of the specialists lists, to include all of those holding postgraduate qualifications and training relevant to a given speciality.

## Conclusion

There will be difficult times ahead before Orthodontics is officially recognized in Spain. However, despite being faced by significant professional and institutional challenges, the recognition of dental specialities *will come* to the eventual benefit of the population at large, the general

dental practitioners and also the 'specialists' already working in Spain. It is only the courage to keep pursuing

this aim that we need . . . be assured the orthodontists in Spain have that courage!