A study on improvement for national examination of dental hygienists in Korea

Young-Ok Nam, Sun-Hee Jang, Kim Seon Yeong
WonKwang Health Science University, Chunnam Techno College

key words: national health promotion act, oral health cure human resources, health cure services, comprehensive dental hygiene management

1. Introduction

National health promotion act had enacted and been carried out since 1995 as an aggressive political correspondence to the increasing public health needs and as a public health assurance plan. From this institutional establishment that could consolidate public health promotion in national level, social needs and roles of a dental hygienist is emphasized\(^1\) and needs for professional healthcare workers for providing higher-quality dental health service is increasing. Dental hygienist must pass the national dental hygienist exam enforced under the provision of the 4th Medical technicians, etc. act and obtain a licence from the Health, Welfare and Family affairs Minister, and the importance of this role as the only human resources that shares oral cure of the public is rising. Korea’s first batch of the dental hygienist came out in 1971 with 11 licensed professionals\(^2\), but as of 2003, there are 21,381 dental hygienists with 2,810 enrollment in the faculty of dental hygiene of 35 universities\(^3\). Since the health care sector is known to be labor intensive, with 2/3 of the sector is composed of labor force\(^4\), it is most rational to produce highly qualified dental hygienists in order to create high quality oral care and health service.

Recently, as interest of the public in the national exam that examines the quality of a dental hygienist is increasing, a call for improvement on subjects and system of the national exam for dental hygienist is gaining momentum. Previous studies done on the national exams include conference of training and application of dental hygienist and dental health education development\(^5\), symposium for the development of the national exam for public health worker\(^6\), studies on problems and improvements of the current national exam\(^7\), and groping for
development direction of the national exam for public health worker\(^8\), but case studies are extremely small in quantity. Also, in order to improve the national exam system, basic understanding in current educational ideology and curriculum of a dental hygienist is required. Therefore studies such as analysis of current college dental hygienist curriculum\(^9\), dental hygienist role focused dental hygiene faculty curriculum model development study\(^10\), study on college dental hygiene faculty curriculum improvement and correction\(^11\), exploring for the dental hygienist role focused dental hygiene faculty curriculum model development\(^12\), and oriented direction of the school practices and clinical practices education program of dental hygiene faculty\(^13\) are used to analyze curriculums of faculty of dental hygiene in Korea and models for curriculum are continuously presented through comparative analysis with curriculums foreign countries.

However, increased enrollment of competitively established new faculties of dental hygiene in colleges brings concern about deteriorating quality of dental hygienists, and the four year dental hygienist curriculum instituted in 2002 does not show any distinguishing features from the previous curriculum. Thus, reformation of dental hygiene curriculum is a necessity to amend and correct these problems so to create professional skill practice opportunities for dental hygienists. In addition, since an improvement of curriculum cannot exclude the relations with the national exam in current Korean environment, without a rational improvement of the national exam system including the execution of the national exam, subjects and its range, content, banking questionnaires, improvement of the education cannot be done. Also, comparative analysis with the U.S.A. and Canada, where professionality of dental hygienists are approved and curriculum is accepted to be the top of the world, will yield many advisable improvement ideas.

Therefore, this analysis will grasp the problems of the current national dental hygienist exam system and provide basic data for future dental hygiene curriculum improvement from comparing Canada’s national exam system, which is advanced than Korea’s system, in order to provide improvements for advance dental hygiene education through a rational reformation of the national dental hygienist exam.

2. Study subject and method

2.1. Study subject

The investigator has carried out a convenience sampling on the population composed of participants of the national exam and professors who work for dental hygiene education and health facilities in the country, surveyed for 15 days, from June 9th of 2008 to June 23rd of 2008, by using fax and email. Total of 172 survey papers were retrieved and 160 results, excluding dishonest results, were used as the total research data for this study. Based on the public opinion from the collected survey data, possible improvements of the current national