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Regulation of the Dental Qualification in Norway

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THE development of the dental profession as we know it today has occurred in Western civilisation over the past two or three centuries. Although closely linked to surgery in the early stages, it has usually progressed to seek recognition as a speciality or as an independent health caring profession. Shared knowledge of scientific discoveries whether in both the biology and pathology of the oral and dental tissues or of instruments and materials useful in the provision of dental treatment, have tended to keep those societies sharing them in step with one another. It is all the more interesting however, to note how the stages and timing of the development of the profession have varied in neighbouring countries of our civilisation, in this case Norway.

In Norway, general medical practitioners provided dental treatment until 1794 when a law was passed which enabled others who under the supervision of a general medical practitioner had shown ability in the provision of dental treatment, to practise dentistry. This permission was restricted to the district in which they lived and was only for a specified period of time.

The first authorisation to act as a dentist which was not limited by time was issued in 1846 but the restriction to a specified district remained until 1857 when the locality restriction was removed. This process of authorisation was replaced in 1859 by a examination conducted by two medical men and one dentist. There was no requirement for earlier, specific knowledge or any period of apprenticeship.

In 1881 it was decided that the student must have passed the basic school examination at 15 years and also provide a certificate stating that the student had been apprenticed to an authorised dentist for at least two years. These regulations came into operation in 1884. By 1892 the period of apprenticeship had been expanded to three years and the number of examiners increased to four, the new examiner being a dentist. A written examination was now introduced and the practical examination also extended. In 1904 a school leaving certificate was now necessary before study in dentistry could commence and a law passed in 1908 enforced this requirement.

A year later a new dental school was opened and a fresh curriculum established. This was followed by the scrapping of the earlier examining panel of two medical members and two dental members and a new examination set up by the Board of the Dental College. It was not until 1956 that the University assumed responsibility for education and examination in dentistry.

It is also interesting that the earliest women seeking to enter the male dominated dental profession in Norway had unique difficulties similar to those encountered by Lilian Lindsay in her attempts to become a dental student in 1889. In Norway the problem was not entry to a dental school since the first three Norwegian women qualified as dentists in 1872, 1881 and 1882 respectively. The problem concerned admission to the Norwegian Dental Association which refused to admit female dentists on the grounds that it would be "unsettling to the spirit of fellowship of the male colleagues."

Discussion about whether female dentists should be accepted came to a head in 1885 when Sarah Selvik applied for membership together with her brother who was accepted but she was refused. Meanwhile five members were accepted to the Scandinavian Dental Society when it met in Oslo (Kristiania) in 1886. Following this event the Norwegian Dental Association capitulated and the first female member was accepted in 1888.

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