Professional Development with
the Online Dental Practice Readiness Curriculum (DPRC)
The DPRC Story

The online Dental Practice Readiness Curriculum (DPRC) addresses the challenge of learning practice management during the pre-doctoral dental school years, in spite of compressed curricula and limited time for non-clinical topics.

It has been designed as a turnkey program based on years of feedback and testing from dental management instructors wanting an interactive web-based teaching and learning tool. It covers the topics of interest in a four-year program that addresses the dental management educational need of first- to fourth-year dental students, but has the flexibility of being compressed, if necessary, into one or two years of instruction. Eight dental schools are now DPRC partners and have a license to use the program. At present, DPRC is the only totally web-based tool of its kind available anywhere.

Who developed the program and why? How many dental schools are using the DPRC?

- The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio’s School of Dentistry began working on the DPRC in 2004. It emerged from lessons learned in conducting a national study funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation on assisting small organizations to employ strategic planning techniques for achieving and maintaining sustainable operations.

- DPRC was created for Health Science Center students, but soon it became obvious that help from contributing partners was critical for providing long-term maintenance in a continuously changing Web environment that requires accommodating new versions of browsers and operating software, updating content, responding to user preferences and retaining and perfecting the quality of the program.

- Currently eight dental schools partners are using the DPRC.

Was DPRC tested outside the Health Science Center School of Dentistry before being shared with other dental schools?

- Yes. In 2009, the DPRC was evaluated by the School of Dentistry of the Medical College of Georgia, the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry, the Department of Professional Studies of the University of Las Vegas School of Dental Medicine and by Howard University’s College of Dentistry during a collaborative six-month project with the Health Science Center’s School of Dentistry. Results were reported in a two-hour symposium at the 2010 American Dental Education Association (ADEA) national meeting in Washington, D.C.

What products and services are included in a DPRC Partner agreement?

- Access to the program by students and faculty during a school year.

- Rapid turnaround response (usually within 24 hours or less) to any technical question.

- Access by email or phone to the authors of the program.
• Training sessions (regardless of the number of faculty or sessions needed).

• Feedback telephone conferences, usually periodically scheduled at users’ preferences, to address users’ questions and discuss suggestions for DPRC biennial updates.

What would be a brief description of DPRC?

• The Dental Practice Readiness Curriculum, depicted in Figure 1 consists of four sequential levels of learning corresponding to progressively higher levels of competence. It applies the methodology of strategic planning, first, to personal and professional aspirations and, then, to managing a dental practice. The modular organization of the program allows different groupings of the learning material and the compression of the curriculum in less than four years, or the customization of the program to meet special didactic needs. DPRC uses a blended-learning format including online education, simulations and self-directed learning, as an alternative approach to faculty-intensive classroom-based strategies. In keeping with the preferences of today’s students, course materials may be explored and tasks completed “anytime, anywhere.”

Figure 1
The Dental Practice Readiness Curriculum (DPRC)
The DPRC website contains all the educational material traditionally used in class lectures, with enhancements and links only possible online. Notes and quizzes are given to students immediately after submission. Bulletin board announcements are posted and archived online. A self-assessment tool, titled “See My Progress,” keeps track of the percentage of time elapsed (from desired starting to finishing dates set by faculty) versus the percentage of assignments completed (checked as such by students). All required assignments are listed on a page called “My Progress” as live links to the pages where the assignments are to be carried out. Instructors may open a “Student Progress” matrix showing the status of assignment completion for the whole class. A CV/résumé builder is accessible from most pages and stands ready to record personal events and accomplishments soon after they occur. The entries are automatically organized to produce a professional, short résumé or a detailed CV as needed.

Which essential educational domains are addressed when using the DPRC program?

- **Dental Economics**: Understanding the forces producing dental practice financial success or failure.
- **Dental Practice Management**: Exploring, understanding and applying methods of creating a dental practice that expresses and realizes the dentist’s aspirations, potential and mission.
- **Practice Policy**: Recognizing the dentist’s responsibilities to society, patients and the dental team, and learning how to address them while building practice success.
- **Dental Informatics**: Developing the skill of searching, retrieving, organizing and using data from patients, the dental team, the profession and the socioeconomic environment in which the dental practice operates in order to improve the quality of management decisions.
- **CODA competencies** covering practice management and the related topics of behavioral science, professional ethics, and debt financing (2-17, 2-18, 2-16, 2-19, and 4-5).
- **Professionalism**
- **Personal finance and personal debt**

What are some notable educational characteristics of the program?

- The DPRC provides an estimated 128 hours (32 hours per each level/year) of comparable class time via faculty-assisted self-directed learning that does not require extensive classroom time. However, discussion seminars and presentations by invited speakers may be added as valuable complements of the knowledge foundations created by the program. Students access online interactive learning modules and complete required active-learning tasks. Also, they may take notes online, retrievable by keywords, as well as consult a reference manual, connect via suggested links with other sections of the program and the Internet, and receive immediate feedback on quizzes. The focus of the program is on professionalism, critical thinking and problem solving.

- The educational objective is the acquisition of skills for managing a successful dental practice that would provide financial and psychic rewards to dentists, create value for patients, offer opportunities to personnel and deliver welfare to the public. The “personal discovery” approach employed in developing personal finance and practice management skills empowers students to control student debt, imparts essential know-how to those who will go into practice ownership immediately after graduation and provides useful market-valued competencies to those who will be seeking associateships, entering military or public health careers, joining the faculty of a dental school or pursuing other career choices.
With the DPRC four-levels approach, students are guided, first, to develop a strategic plan for achieving personal and professional goals. Then, they apply strategic planning methods to the solutions of dental practice challenges likely to confront them after graduation. In Level One, students complete a career strategic plan and, after learning about personal finance, are encouraged to draft a personal budget to support it and address, when appropriate, debt management. Then, in Level Two, they apply what they have learned about goal setting, mission and vision statements and basic finance to a hypothetical dental practice operation. Level Three adds the principles of personnel oversight, patient management and business finance. Important additional topics of Level Three are a guide for selecting and securing an associateship and an overview of ergonomics. The educational experience is concluded, at Level Four, with guidance for selecting a practice location, Q&A on transition to practice issues, exploration of the Wall Street Journal as a prototype source for financial information and a sequence of programmed steps that prompt the use and refinement of the work done at previous levels to produce a professional business plan good enough to support a viable proposal for a dental practice loan. This concluding work provides evidence of a level of competence in the practice of dentistry rarely possessed by new dentists. And, the lack of it is the well-documented regret of dental school alumni.

A recent addition to the program is "assignment and review assistance," an interactive guide to the material needed to do well on assignments.

Forthcoming is the "instructor grading assistance" that simplifies monitoring and grading students’ performance.

Finally, the program, when completed, satisfies the 2013 Commission on Dental Accreditation pre-doctoral dental education competencies focused on practice management.

What results can educators expect when using the program?

DPRC promotes student-teacher communication and creates student awareness of personal goals and their consistency with the goals of success in practicing dentistry. Additionally, it builds a conceptual framework that supports better decisions when, after graduation, the new dentists face the complex economic, financial and personnel challenges that many dental practitioners resolve only via costly trial and error.

How many faculty hours are needed to teach the DPRC?

The learning structure of the DPRC facilitates the successful utilization of part-time clinical faculty with interest but not experience in practice management and the involvement of practicing dentists with interest but not experience in teaching. An interactive "instructor companion" currently under construction will minimize the time required for students’ evaluation and grading.

Faculty time requirements depend on the emphasis given to the practice management discipline by the individual dental school. It ranges from just coordination, advice and evaluation (estimated at a 2- to 4-hour meeting per DPRC learning level or 8- to 16-meeting hours for the whole program) to more elaborate time allocations involving seminars, special projects and invited speakers.

DPRC creates an adequate knowledge base for the required competencies via a self-learning interacting system, but, at the same time, it supports, encourages and enhances more in-depth explorations of dental
practice management topics with invited speakers and special projects, when additional resources are available to the dental school. The modular format of the program allows customization of the learning material to the individual school's agenda and curriculum objectives.

**Have there been scholarly reviews and presentations of the DPRC?**

Yes. In the past seven years, the DPRC instructors where coauthors of and participants in:

- A poster presentation at the 2009 American Dental Education Association (ADEA) national meeting in Phoenix, Arizona.
- A two-hour symposium at the 2010 American Dental Education Association (ADEA) national meeting in Washington, D.C.
- A videotaped seminar, a separate workshop and a TechExpo table at the 2012 ADEA national meeting in Orlando, Florida.
- Roundtable discussions with DPRC users at the 2014 ADEA national meeting in San Antonio, Texas.
- A TechExpo table, included in the program of the 2015 ADEA meeting in Boston, Massachusetts.

Currently, all DPRC faculty and administrators are included as coauthors or contributing reviewers of a scholarly paper on the DPRC educational experience. The submission of the paper for publication in a peer-reviewed journal is planned for 2017.

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