BEST PRACTICES SESSION

The use of amalgam for restorative dental procedures is a real and controversial issue internationally. There are multiple perspectives to this issue including the effects of amalgam on the human body as well as the impact of amalgam on the environment. Amalgam contains mercury, its use in dental procedures and disposal of amalgam contaminated waste need to be understood by dental graduates. Longevity of amalgam fillings (15-25 years), its widespread use globally and population migration pose challenges for at least 30 years for dental practitioners. Importantly they need to have an appreciation of various perspectives on the issue including those of government and private dentists, restorative specialists, adult and child patients, lawyers, consumer and dental representatives, government and public health officials, as well as health journalists. Face to face debates and lectures on the use of dental amalgam do not allow for these multiple perspectives to be considered. Nor does it allow for students to engage in collaborative learning. The aim is to allow various points of view to be formed. Students do this in an interactive, experiential environment. Rather than be passive receivers of knowledge they are placed in a situation where they not only get to express a point of view, they also do this from the perspective of a persona. It may not necessarily be their personal point of view and the students get to reflect on this via a debrief at the conclusion of the online activity. Students are allocated to groups (4-6 students per persona) and as a team work together to research and build their case for public viewing by other personas on the class discussion board, as well as the final decision-makers.

A 'Dental Amalgam eSim' – an online roleplay has recently been developed for use by Bachelor of Dental Science students in the Middle East as well as in Australia. This presentation will demonstrate the online roleplay environment which has been developed in the learning management system Blackboard[TM,] and briefly overview the situational learning methodology[12] and Community of Inquiry[3] framework which underpinned the instructional design development, as well as the issues and lessons learnt, including student evaluation.

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[1] Situational Learning http://www.adelaide.edu.au/situationallearning

[3] Garrison D & Anderson T (2003) *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice*, RoutledgeFalmer, Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York