Dental students already plagued by neck and back problems at university

By DTI

LONDON, UK: Undergraduate dental students already experience musculoskeletal pain as dental practitioners do, a study performed at King’s College London Dental Institute and published in the British Dental Journal has found. By surveying 380 King’s students on the issue, researchers found that around half of the respondents had experienced extended periods of pain in the lower back and other parts of their musculoskeletal system.

To make things worse, only every fifth student had sought professional treatment for these problems. Neglecting to seek care, according to the researchers, could result in serious health issues later in life, including musculoskeletal damage.

While pain in practising dentists due to incorrect posture and prolonged static positions during dental treatment is relatively well understood, the study is the first to have conducted extensive research to establish how early the problems start in a dental career. According to the results, lower back pain was already highly prevalent among students at the Dental Institute, with over 50 per cent of those surveyed having experienced lower back pain for at least 30 days during each year of their BDS programme.

In order to prevent the problems from worsening, the researchers introduced preventive measures to students, including a personal trainer giving advice on exercises and coping strategies to help improve their posture in the short term, as well as more widespread use of loupes.

Furthermore, co-author of the study Dr Mark Ide announced he has started working with colleagues at the British School of Osteopathy to look at the efficacy of some self-care techniques to help alleviate the problems.

“Chronic neck and back pain is a known problem among dental personnel, to the extent that some eventually have to stop clinical work,” said Prof. Mark Woolford, Dean for Education at the Dental Institute. “It is essential dental schools are aware of this and are taking measures to educate and support those oral healthcare workers in training, at the very beginning of their careers.”

The study “Musculoskeletal neck and back pain in undergraduate dental students at a UK dental school—A cross-sectional study”, was published online on 9 September in the British Dental Journal.