

7-1940

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Recommended Citation

Grant, James W. (1940) "An Open Letter To The Student Body "Are Dental Internships Valuable"," *The Dentoscope*: Vol. 20: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/dentoscope/vol20/iss2/4>

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An Open Letter to the Student Body, "Are Dental Internships Valuable?"

By JAMES M. GRANT, D.D.S., '39

February 14, 1940.

DEAR FELLOW STUDENTS:

Sometime ago I received a letter from Morris Kelman asking me to write an article for the "Dentoscope" on the desirability of dental internships. Such an article was to be based upon my experience and observation while interning here at Forsyth. He pointed out that the object of this request was to stimulate interest in dental internships among the students at Howard Dental School. After thinking it over, I decided that I would not attempt to defend either side of the question relative to the comparative worth of dental internships, since at this time I have no basis for comparison; but rather to give you a description of the "setup" here at Forsyth and present some of the more general features relative to this mode of furthering one's dental education and experience.

The Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children was founded by John and Thomas A. Forsyth in memory of their brothers, James and George Forsyth, and was incorporated in 1910 by a special act of the Massachusetts legislature. It was dedicated November 12, 1914, and the clinics were in operation by the first of January, 1915.

The aim of the institution is to "render serviceable the carious teeth of children; to teach the principles of mouth hygiene and to make every effort to determine wherein lies prevention."

The operative equipment is modern and the staff consists of men especially trained in all phases of children's dentistry.

A research department is maintained for the study of dental diseases and the policies and practices are largely based on the scientific findings of this department.

The personnel of the clinic consists of about twenty-three internes from as many different schools throughout the country. If I may digress for a moment, I might say that one of

the chief objections to a dental internship on the part of some observers is that one loses time toward practice building. The answer to this is that the association with these fellow internes and the exchange of ideas from the different institutions more than compensate for whatever time is lost, for in this manner one's knowledge is increased and one's professional contact is enhanced considerably.

The work of the interne consists mainly of operative procedures to arrest the decay in teeth of children and to restore to function many carious teeth which might be lost through lack of proper treatment. During the course of the year assignments are made to the following: the dental department, which consists of operative and extraction clinics; the orthodontia department, and the medical department, which consists of dental, pediatric and nutrition clinics.

A wonderful opportunity for broadening one's dental education is given by means of the lecture courses which are presented by a group of distinguished scholars, among whom are such men as Dr. Kurt H. Thoma, Dr. Varaztad H. Kajanjian, Dr. Walter B. Cannon, Professor Ernest A. Hooton, Dr. A. Baird Hastings and many others who are just as well known in their particular fields. It is the aim of this program to incite recent graduates "to take steps toward self-education, to read broadly and discriminatingly, and to cultivate habits of critical thought."

As you know, the value of the dental internship has been debated pro and con since the practice was first instituted. It is a question which *more and more dental graduates* face each succeeding year. Graduation and then the state boards have been the usual order of things. To many, a year of additional study and training was just a waste of time, an unnecessary procrastination; yet we realize now that there is a definite gap to be filled between dental college and actual practice. This gap is the maturing or developing of self-confidence in the young practitioner. There is no better place than a dental internship to make this transition. Ability to judge for one's self, plus the acceptance of responsibilities and duties which were assumed by one's instructors in school, is the beneficial result of this period of training.

It is not to be denied that the general public assumes that the person with advanced training is better prepared than

the fledgeling fresh from school. Where greater confidence is placed by the public, better financial returns accrue. The dental internship gives prestige and inspires confidence.

All aspects of the internship are by no means favorable. There are, as we must know, certain disadvantages. Doing children's work or oral surgery specifically every day does not help one to become proficient in the other phases of dentistry. The reverse is also true. But since most internships entail this unfortunate feature, we should choose with care the particular kind of training we desire. It has been said that we can make little or no progress toward the increasing of the percentage of American people with clean, healthy mouths until the people, as well as the profession, learn and appreciate that the investment of comparatively small amounts of time and money for dentistry during childhood and youth adds years of health and comfort, and, in most instances, eliminates the necessity for large and expensive dental restorations in middle life and during the years of decline of physical vitality. The profession and the individual dentist should make every effort to continue the progress of children's dentistry. A generation sold on dentistry will come to adulthood with a full knowledge and appreciation of the role of the dentist in preserving the health of the nation. This statement is meant in no way to minimize the importance of training in hospitals, because many features of this type of internship are more than desirable. It is meant to point out the trend that modern dentistry is taking in order to eliminate the forceps as the chief asset of the dental practitioner.

In the hospital men in the dental profession realize the importance of cooperating with physicians. Physicians, in turn, are beginning to understand the importance of working with dentists. This association is conducive to better relationship between the dental and the medical professions.

The argument concerning the value of dental internships is just as strong and pointed on one side as the other. In the final analysis, the decision rests mainly with the graduate himself.

I have found my internship here at Forsyth interesting and beneficial. The professional contacts, the intellectual development and the financial "lift" are three factors which

would make me say to you to adopt the same attitude toward the dental interneship that men in the medical profession do. It must be considered as a necessary part of your training which in the years to come will stand you in good stead.

Yours truly,

“JIM.”

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