

DENTAL EDUCATION



Modifications To the National Dental Examining Board Of Canada's Certification Process

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ABSTRACT

Following a lengthy and intense consultation with stakeholders, and an analysis of the present certification process, the National Dental Examining Board of Canada (NDEB) and the 10 provincial licensing authorities recently approved major changes to the certification process for dental licensure in Canada. As of January 1997, graduates of dental programs accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation (ADA Commission) must complete successfully the same examinations as graduates of programs accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC) to be licensed to practice in Canada. In addition, NDEB's examination system for graduates of dental programs that are not accredited by CDAC or the ADA Commission (i.e. international programs) will be discontinued on December 31, 1999. As of January 1, 2000, graduates of non-accredited programs will be required to complete a CDAC accredited, university-based qualifying program to be eligible to participate in the same certification process as graduates of ADA Commission and CDAC accredited dental programs.

Background

NDEB was established by an act of Parliament in 1952.¹ Its purpose was to establish and maintain qualifying conditions for a national standard of competence for dentistry in Canada, and to issue a certificate to those dentists who met the standard.

From 1971 to 1993, graduates of undergraduate dental programs accredited by CDAC were granted a certificate on the basis of graduation from an accredited program. This was made possible through the involvement of NDEB in the CDAC accreditation process. NDEB members were appointed to CDAC's site survey accreditation teams, participated in the Clinical Outcomes Review Evaluation (CORE), and reviewed accreditation standards documents. In addition, two NDEB members were appointed to CDAC. This allowed NDEB to critically assess the evaluation process in each of Canada's accredited dental programs, and recognize that there was sufficient evidence that graduates met the national standard.

Graduates of all undergraduate dental programs not accredited by CDAC were required to complete successfully a written and a three-part clinical examination.²

In 1994, following a request from Canada's provincial licensing authorities, NDEB changed the certification process for graduates of CDAC accredited programs. To be certified, these graduates were required to pass the NDEB's Written Examination and the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).² No changes were made to the certification process for graduates of programs not accredited by CDAC. **Fig. 1** shows the certification process in place from 1994 to 1996.

The results of the Written Examination for 1994 through 1996 are shown in **Fig. 2**. For comparison, the results for 1992 and 1993 are also provided. The high reliability coefficients (KR 20 > 0.96) show that this examination has extremely good reliability. As predicted by NDEB, the graduates of Canadian faculties of dentistry had very high (99 to 100 per cent) pass rates. Graduates of American programs had slightly lower pass rates, but the difference in the mean scores (three per cent to five per cent) between Canadian and U.S. graduates was small. There was, however, a large difference in the mean scores (eight to 15 per cent) and pass rates (93 to 100 per cent, 47 to 68 per cent) between

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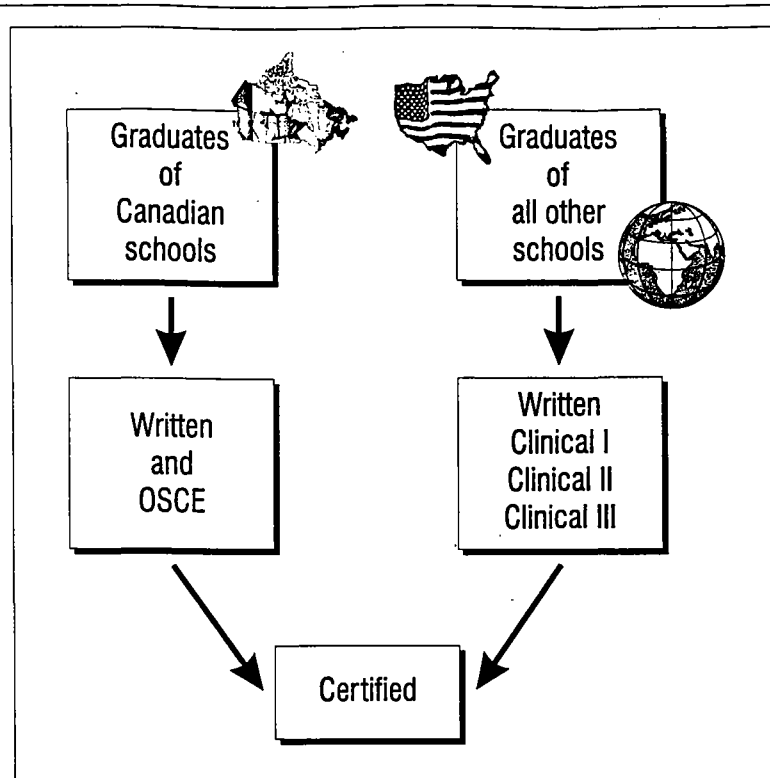


Fig. 1: NDEB Certification Process, 1994-1996.

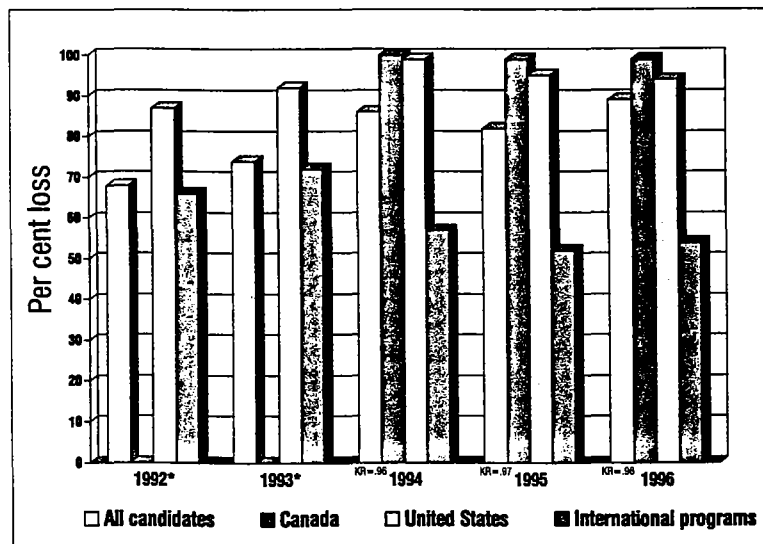


Fig. 2: Pass rates, NDEB written examination.

* Graduates of accredited Canadian programs were not required to take the examination in 1992 and 1993.

graduates of Canadian and U.S. programs versus graduates of international programs. These results led to further discussion regarding the certification process.

Following a comprehensive consultation process with the provincial licensing authorities, CDAC, the Association of Canadian Faculties of Dentistry (ACFD), the American Association of Den-

tal Schools (AADS), the ADA Commission and the Canadian Dental Association (CDA), a notice of motion was presented to the 1995 NDEB annual meeting. The notice of motion was also circulated to other stakeholders, which led to its subsequent revision. Several conditions that required action by ADA, ACFD and CDAC prior to NDEB adopting the

proposed motion were identified. In addition, to preserve the principle of national portability, there was consensus that the motion must be ratified by all 10 provincial licensing authorities.

In 1996, the ADA Commission, CDAC and ACFD confirmed that the required conditions could and would be met. The motion was subsequently passed by NDEB at its annual meeting in November, and ratified by all 10 provincial licensing authorities. CDA's council on education (CDA Council) and ADA's council on education (ADA Council) both confirmed that the changes were consistent with the intent of the ADA/CDA reciprocity agreement, which allows graduates of American and Canadian dental schools to seek licensure in either Canada or the United States with no requirement for further education.

The Revised Certification Process

Following a request from NDEB through the CDAC, the ADA Commission made changes to its accreditation procedures. These changes included the addition of state and national licensing board representatives to all site survey teams, formalizing the relationship between the ADA Commission and CDAC to guarantee formal representation and involvement in each other's accreditation processes, and the identification of outcome measurements similar to CDAC's CORE process. This allowed NDEB to verify that the accreditation processes of CDAC and the ADA Commission were equivalent.

As a result of this process, U.S. and Canadian graduates of accredited undergraduate dental programs will be considered to be "accredited graduates." To be licensed in Canada, these graduates must pass the NDEB Written and OSCE Examinations within seven years of graduation.

As shown in Fig. 3, for the three-year period from January 1, 1997, to December 31, 1999, graduates of non-accredited dental programs may be certified either by passing a comprehensive certification examination that consists of a written and

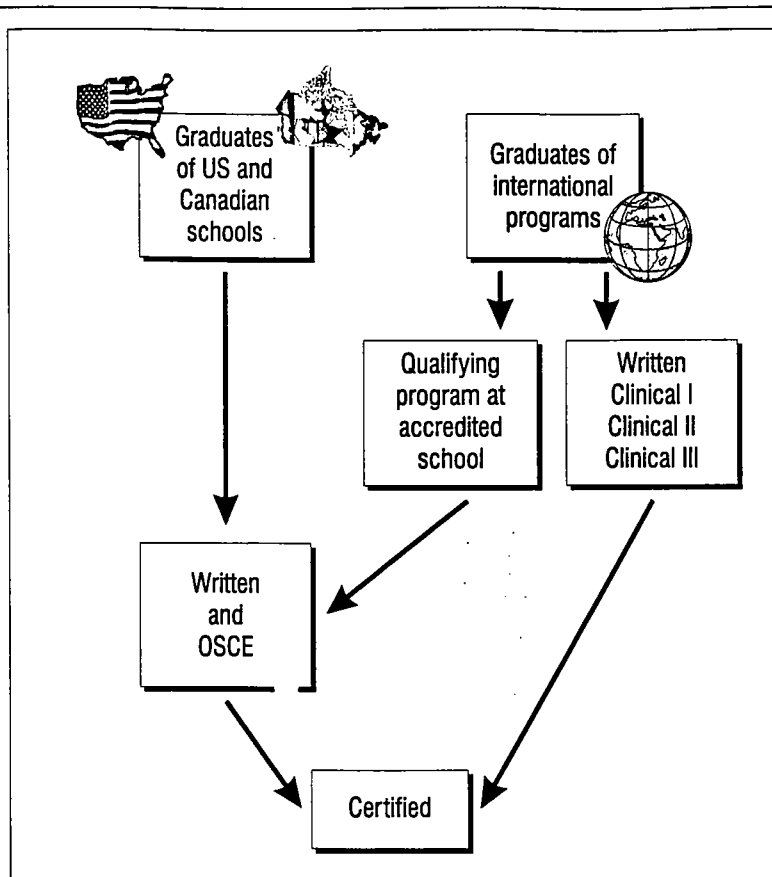


Fig. 3: NDEB Certification Process, 1997-1999.

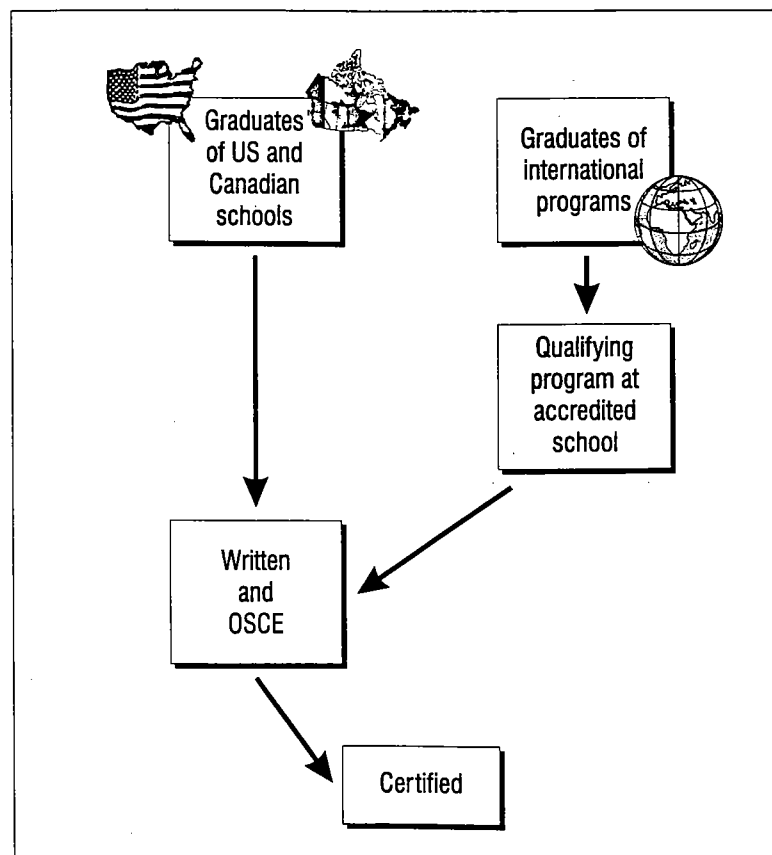


Fig. 4: NDEB Certification Process, after 2000.

three-phase clinical examination, or by graduating from a CDAC accredited qualifying program and then passing the NDEB Written and OSCE Examinations.

After December 31, 1999, NDEB will discontinue the three-phase clinical examination. Therefore, all graduates of non-accredited dental programs will have to complete a qualifying program to be eligible for dental certification and licensure in Canada (Fig. 4). The new certification process will be similar to the current process used for medical certification in Canada, which was supported by judicial decisions in 1986³ and 1988.⁴

With coordination by ACFD, several Canadian faculties of dentistry are now in the process of developing and implementing a two-year qualifying program for graduates of non-accredited dental programs. This will allow these graduates to complete a qualifying program prior to the discontinuation of NDEB's clinical examinations.

CDAC has developed an accreditation process for the qualifying programs, which included the establishment of accreditation standards. The standards ensure that a valid admission procedure, including an entrance examination, is used to select candidates at each participating dental school, that adequate resources are available for the qualifying program without diminishing the resources available to other CDAC accredited programs at the institution, and that an effective evaluation system is in place to ensure that the graduates of qualifying programs meet the same academic and clinical standards as graduates of the school's accredited DDS/DMD programs. Although admission procedures will be unique to each qualifying program, all applicants will be required to take ACFD's Eligibility Examination. This examination will assess the applicant's academic preparation in the biomedical and introductory clinical sciences.

Conclusions

1. Undergraduate dental programs in Canada and the Unit-

ed States follow rigorous and equivalent accreditation procedures, which are administered by CDAC and the ADA Commission respectively. NDEB recognizes these processes, due to their direct input and involvement in program evaluation.

2. The reciprocal agreement between the ADA Council and the CDA Council is maintained and remains unique, as no other jurisdictions participate in this agreement.
3. NDEB has established a reliable examination process, which supports:
 - a) the recognition of graduates of programs accredited by the ADA Commission; and
 - b) the opportunity for further education of graduates of non-accredited programs.
4. Graduates of non-accredited programs can apply for admission to accredited qualifying programs at Canadian faculties of dentistry. These qualifying programs will provide the academic and clinical experience necessary to meet the national standard for certification.
5. Graduates of all CDAC and ADA Commission accredited programs (including qualifying programs) will be required to complete successfully the same certification examinations (i.e. NDEB's Written and OSCE Examinations).
6. These changes are consistent with NDEB's mandate to establish and maintain qualifying and testing conditions for a national standard of competence, which the provincial licensing authorities can accept for entry into dental practice in Canada.

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Letters

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funding for dental care, they would refer that child to a volunteer dentist. Necessary dental work would be done, and the dentist would receive a charitable donation receipt from the organization for the full value of the services rendered. Although the dentist would essentially be working for nothing, the tax receipt would defray most of the overhead costs of providing care to the needy child.

Under the existing system, community care groups must ask dentists to not only donate their time to treat needy children, but also their overhead costs.

The government has created tax incentives to promote everything from oil exploration to Canadian movies. Isn't it about time they created tax relief that would enhance the quality of a poor child's dental health?

CDA should focus its attention on this truly worthy national issue, as a tax incentive would encourage dentists to become more philanthropic. The government could also take credit for creating this dental health opportunity for our poor children, who really need a better quality of life.

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Poor Kids

As a dentist and the director of public health for downtown Toronto, let me congratulate you on your excellent editorial. With the increasing numbers of homeless people on our city streets — and the explosive growth of street kids with children under two — it is important for such a recognized body as CDA to express its concern about this unacceptable condition.

A few years ago, the Toronto Department of Public Health conducted an oral health survey of street youth, published in the *Journal*. It found that the level of poor oral health was far, far greater in this population than in the average Toronto youth population. In response, the dental profession in Toronto, working in collaboration with the agencies serving these youth, the public health department and others, have created a dental clinic in an agency that serves street youth.

This represents the powerful effect the dental profession can have when it works with others in the community. Your editorial appropriately raises the issue to the national level, and offers CDA the opportunity to be an advocate on behalf of poor children with the federal government, by calling for a national task force to address the issue of poor children and poor oral health.

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Letters may be edited for space and clarity, at the discretion of the editor.