A survey of undergraduate orthodontic training and orthodontic practices by general dental practitioners

Purpose of the study: to assess satisfaction with undergraduate orthodontic training, the variety of treatments undertaken in general practice, practitioners’ perceived competence in orthodontics and the level of interest in continuing education in orthodontics.

Design: cross-sectional questionnaire-based study.

Materials and methods: a questionnaire was mailed to 520 general practitioners in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow as listed in Irish Dental Council Register of Dentists 2003.

Results: forty-six per cent of dentists responded. More than half (54 per cent) of the respondents were satisfied with both academic and clinical aspects of undergraduate training. Twenty-nine per cent regularly perform orthodontic treatment. Only 60 per cent feel comfortable treating orthodontic emergencies. Over 70 per cent have either already attended or aspire to attend further training in orthodontic diagnosis and interceptive orthodontics.

Conclusions: our study indicates that in the greater Dublin area, graduates (those qualified less than 10 years) are increasingly satisfied with undergraduate teaching. Orthodontic treatment is performed regularly in general dental practice with interceptive procedures most often carried out. While ability to deal with orthodontic emergencies is not universal, practitioners do appear confident to perform a variety of orthodontic procedures. Interest in continuing education in orthodontics is very high. Our study indicates that participation in continuing education in orthodontics appears to translate into greater provision of orthodontic care in general practice.

Introduction
Undergraduate orthodontic training should prepare graduates adequately for work in general practice. Little evidence is available concerning the efficacy of undergraduate education in preparation of graduates for life as a qualified dental practitioner. Kay and Blinkhorn (1987) in a questionnaire-based study exposed great dissatisfaction among recent graduates in relation to undergraduate orthodontic training with many graduates complaining that they had never actually treated an orthodontic case as an undergraduate.

The General Dental Council in the United Kingdom (UK) gives guidance with respect to minimum standards expected of dental graduates in the UK. The General Dental Council in its First Five Years document (2002) has suggested that the new graduate should:

- Be competent at orthodontic assessment including indication of treatment need.
- Be competent at managing appropriately all forms of orthodontic emergency including referral where necessary.
- Be competent at making appropriate referral based on assessment.
- Have the knowledge to be able to explain and discuss treatment with patients and their parents.
- Have the knowledge to be able to design, insert and adjust space maintainers.
- Have the knowledge to design, insert and adjust active removable appliances to move a single tooth or correct crossbite.
- Be familiar with contemporary treatment techniques.

Although this document refers to the situation in the UK, it has implications in a European context as significant advances towards convergence in standards of undergraduate education throughout Europe have been made in recent years. General dental practitioners have an influential role to play in management of orthodontic patients. Suggested responsibilities of general practitioners include diagnosis and assessment of orthodontic treatment need, supervision of the development of the dentition, interception of developing problems and specialist referral for advice and treatment where necessary.

While general dental practitioners may...