A COMPARISON STUDY OF DENTAL STUDENT'S ATTITUDES ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TWO DIFFERENT MOCK EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine-Illinois (CDMI) implemented Mock Employment Interviews for their senior dental students Class of 2017. This initial iteration of Mock Interviews involved two faculty members acting as interviewers for a fictitious dental associate position. In the fall of 2017, CDMI conducted Mock Employment Interviews using a different technique with hopes of reducing the level of faculty commitment while at the same time giving the students a rich interview experience. The Class of 2018 students took turns being the interviewer and then interviewee. The authors hypothesized that the students would learn more about practice management through playing the role of the practice owner and interviewer. The role of faculty for the second iteration of Mock Employment Interviews was that of observer of the interaction between students playing the role of interviewer and interviewee. A survey was conducted in the spring of 2018 asking the dental students about their attitudes and the effectiveness of their mock interview experience. This study compared the Class of 2017 responses to the Class of 2018 responses. The Class of 2017 rated their Mock Interview experience more favorably than the Class of 2018.

Keywords: Mock Employment Interviews, Interviews, Career Preparation, Role Play, Practice Management

INTRODUCTION

Very few articles regarding mock employment interviews for dental students exist. Midwestern University CDMI recognized the need to provide interview training for their senior students. Midwestern CDMI introduced mock employment interviews into the practice management curriculum during the fall quarter 2016. Obucina, Jurgens-Toepke, Gettig and Van Kanegan (2018) found that dental student's attitudes regarding mock interviews were positive.1 The development of mock employment interviews can be utilized by other health profession education programs. The appropriate time to

conduct mock employment interviews may vary depending on the program. Dental students found mock interviews to be most useful during the summer and early fall quarter of their senior year. Summer interviews would benefit dental students that are applying for Postgraduate programs as well as GPR programs.

It is imperative that dental students are trained in the art of interviewing. A good interview could lead to acceptance into a specialty program and ultimately a position in a dental office. Midwestern CDMI changed their mock employment interview protocol for the Class of 2018. The protocol for the Class of 2017 involved two faculty members acting as business owners that were looking for an associate. The students were interviewed by both faculty members for a fictitious associate dental position. During the second iteration of Mock Employment Interviews (Class of 2018), the faculty became observers of the interviewer and interviewees. The students took turns acting as the interviewer and then the interviewee. The student's attitudes on the effectiveness of the mock interview process was compared between the Class of 2017 and the Class of 2018 protocols.

METHODS

The Class of 2017 students and faculty were given two lectures: 1. developing a curriculum vitae (CV), cover letter and thank you note, and 2. interviewing etiquette, appropriate interview questions and illegal interview questions. Students were told that they would be interviewing for an associate position with a fictitious Dr. Smiley. They were given information regarding Dr. Smiley, his office and the associate position. Faculty were calibrated during a one-hour session to be the interviewer, Dr. Smiley. During the calibration session, faculty were briefed on Dr. Smiley's office protocol and demographics. Faculty read the job description and were encouraged to ask questions about their role as interviewer. They were given sample interview questions that were considered inappropriate such as: "Are you married? "Do you have children? and "What religion are you?"

The Class of 2018 Mock Employment Interview process had two modifications to the interview format. The Class of 2018 had students interview each other during mock interviews, instead of having faculty interviewing the students. Another change was to allow students to wear their clinical scrubs, instead of dressing professionally for the interview. Due to a scheduling logistics and conflicts, it was felt that the students would not have enough time to change back into clinical scrubs after the interviews were completed. Aside from these changes, students were given the identical information as the Class of 2017, but they were instructed to prepare to play both the roles of interviewer and interviewee. Faculty were likewise given the same information about the fictitious dental practice, but were instructed to only act as facilitators and not active participants in the interview process.

The two course coordinators, acted in an oversight capacity both years to ensure the simulation went smoothly and were an available resource for students and faculty, if needed.

A comparison of faculty and facility resources used each year can be found in the results section, Table 1.

A fictitious dentist, Dr. Smiley and his/her dental practice was developed by combining elements from various dental office websites. Identical information was given to the students both years. An associate dentist job posting was obtained from the Chicago Dental Society Review journal. This specific posting was chosen because it offered a full-time position, open to recent graduates, at a very high rate of compensation. The investigator's approach was to present the students with an attractive offer, but then bring out other, potentially unfavorable, information that would test the students' ethics and practice philosophy to see how they would tackle some potentially difficult realities e.g. on-call every weekend, extractions, endodontics, travel between multiple office locations, and aggressive treatment philosophy.

The students were shown attractive office photos. The main page of the fictitious website shows that the office is open 47 hours per week, including Saturdays, and that "many insurance plans are accepted" including PPO and HMO plans. The practice demographics were average for a mid-sized suburban location. Dr. Smiley had a history of a licensure reprimand, albeit over 20 years ago, for "poor and inadequate maintenance of records of treatment resulting in insurance billings submitted for services not rendered."

Further in the website, there was information regarding some of the procedures performed by Dr. Smiley with statements such as they prefer to replace "silver/mercury" fillings with tooth-colored resin, and "white fillings are healthier because no traces of mercury are used." It was obvious that Dr. Smiley catered to consumerism.

Dr. Smiley's blog offered statements by him that the office staff has "extreme pressure to get all the little things right. I have monthly meetings with my staff at our three offices, and truth be told, they probably look at me like I'm a looney…I hope and pray my staff and patients get a sense that this is what I'm after when I go crazy town with my requests, expectations and routines." Dr. Smiley was attempting to show a playful side of his/her personality.

The students were also exposed to the practice's social media postings of a free dental day and "Shark Week™" humor. Also, in the social media arena, Dr. Smiley's office promotions credit patient's account ledgers for giving Facebook™ "Likes" and patient referrals. Office Yelp™ reviews were mixed showing a rushed office atmosphere and at least one presumably rude front office staff member. During concurrent practice management didactic sessions both classes (2016 and 2017) were informed of the ethical and legal ramifications of paying for patient referrals.

Mock employment interviews were conducted in the same conference rooms both years. Students were instructed to bring their CV, cover letter and a thank you note to the

interview when they acted as the interviewee, both years. The Class of 2017 students were instructed to dress in professional attire, e.g. suit. The Class of 2018 students were not expected to dress in professional attire. The logistics of changing back into clinical scrubs and returning to clinic in a timely fashion made it impossible to dress in a suit for their interviews.

Mock employment interviews conducted for the Class of 2017 had two faculty interview each individual student. Mock employment interviews for the Class of 2018 involved one faculty member observing two students interviewing each other. The Class of 2018 faculty observed 3 separate pairs of student's interview each other at each session. For example, Student A was the new associate applying for a position in Dr. Smiley's office. Student B was Dr. Smiley. After the interview was completed, Student B became the associate applying for a position, and Student A became Dr. Smiley. At the conclusion of mock employment interviews for the Class of 2017 and Class of 2018 faculty gave feedback to all students that participated in the interview process. Midwestern faculty have diverse past experiences with interviewing staff members. Their business acumen allowed for rich feedback to the students. Students also gave feedback to each other.

The feedback from faculty was used as formative and summative assessment. Students were graded on their performance as an interviewer and interviewee. Faculty and students (through peer and self-assessment) also assessed the CV's and cover letter. They received a pass/fail grade. This process continued until all students completed their mock interviews.

At the conclusion of the mock interviews, faculty and students debriefed on each student interview. Students were given positive and negative feedback regarding their appearance, body language, ability to answer interview questions, and preparedness for the interview e.g., thorough understanding of the position and Dr. Smiley's office, CV, cover letter, thank you note, and their posed questions.

Afterwards, the Classes of 2017 and 2018, were invited to participate in a voluntary survey about the perceived benefits of the mock employment interview exercise and the numbers of actual interviews and offers they had received. The survey items 1 through 11 asked about perceived benefits of the exercise and were scored on a 6-point Likert scale (6= Strongly Agree, 5= Agree, 4= Tend to Agree, 3= Tend to Disagree, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree). Items 12 to 15 in the survey asked students about whether they received offers to interview for employment and/or residencies before and/or after the mock interview experiences and, if so, how many interviews were offered. In addition, one item asked how many interviews students had completed before receiving their first job offer. Students were also asked their age and sex.

Results

The Class of 2017 had a total of 87/123 (70.7%) students complete the survey. The mean age of respondents was 28 with a slight majority (56.8%) of respondents being

male (Table 2). Median responses to 11 items that started with the stem "The DENTD 1821 mock employment interviews were valuable in helping me…" was "Agree" for 9/11 of the items and "Tend to Agree" for the remaining 2/11 items. The item with the highest level of agreement (median 5= agree, mean 4.98) was "…formulate questions I want to ask my potential employer". The item with the lowest level of agreement (median 4= tend to agree, mean 4.01) was "…reduce the anxiety I feel during interviews".

The Class of 2018 had a total of 45/126 (35.7%) students complete the survey. The mean age of respondents was 26.9 with a slight majority (57%) of respondents being male (Table 2). Median responses to 11 items that started with the stem "The DENTD 1821 mock employment interviews were valuable in helping me…" was "Agree" for 9/11 of the items and "Tend to Agree" for the remaining 2/11 items. The item with the highest level of agreement (median 5= agree, mean 4.40) was "…recognize inappropriate and/or illegal employer questions and how to reply to them." The item with the lowest level of agreement (median 4= tend to agree, mean 3.60) was "…self-assess my overall preparedness for an interview for a post graduate, AEGD or GPR residency program position".

See Table 3 for a comparison of Class of 2017 and Class of 2018 survey responses.

Table 1. Resources

	Class of 2017	Class of 2018
Number of students participating	123	126
Average number of students interviewed per room/per hour	1.71	6
Average number rooms utilized each interview day	6	5.25
Number of interview dates scheduled	4	4
Number of faculty participating	24	20
Interview hours required of each faculty	6	1.05
Preparation hours required of each faculty	2	1
Calibration lecture hours per faculty	1	1
Total faculty hours required	216	61

Table 2. Demographics

	Class of 2017	Class of 2018
Age, Mean (SD)	28.0 (3) N=74	26.9 (1.5) N=39
No. Female (%),	33 (40.7) N=79	18 (43.0) N=42

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Table 3. Survey Responses Comparing Class of 2017 and Class of 2018

"The DENTD 1821 mock employment interviews were valuable in helping me …"		No. Responses	Mean (SD)	p-value
Anticipate likely employer questions and how to reply to them.	Class 2017	87	4.53 (1.0)	0.127
	Class 2018	45	4.13 (1.3)	
Recognize inappropriate and/or illegal employer questions and how to reply to them.	Class 2017	87	4.78 (1.0)	0.046a
	Class 2018	45	4.40 (1.1)	
Formulate questions I want to ask my potential employer.	Class 2017	87	4.98 (0.95)	0.003a
	Class 2018	45	4.42 (1.1)	
Investigate a dental practice's demographic data.	Class 2017	86	4.53 (1.0)	0.007a
	Class 2018	45	3.89 (1.3)	
Investigate a dental practice's philosophy.	Class 2017	87	4.56 (1.0)	0.001a
	Class 2018	45	3.87 (1.2)	
Investigate a dental practice's social media presence.	Class 2017	85	4.52 (0.96)	0.034a
	Class 2018	45	3.98 (1.4)	
Reduce the anxiety I feel during interviews.	Class 2017	86	4.01 (1.2)	0.226
	Class 2018	44	3.66 (1.3)	
Be more aware of my non-verbal body language.	Class 2017	86	4.48 (1.1)	0.049a
	Class 2018	44	4.00 (1.3)	
choose appropriate items to create a professional appearance e.g. attire, notepad, business card	Class 2017	87	4.68 (1.1)	0.001a
	Class 2018	45	3.91 (1.3)	
self-assess my overall preparedness for an actual employment interview for an associate dentist employment position	Class 2017	85	4.62 (1.1)	0.003a
	Class 2018	45	3.98 (1.3)	
self-assess my overall preparedness for an interview for a post graduate, AEGD or GPR residency program position	Class 2017	84	4.24 (1.3)	0.011a
	Class 2018	43	3.60 (1.4)	

A statistically significant difference between Class of 2017 and Class of 2018 responses at the 0.05 alpha levels.

When comparing responses between the two classes, statistically significant differences are found for Questions 2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10 and 11 (p-value ≤ 0.05).

The Class of 2017, compared to the Class of 2018, felt that the mock interviews were more valuable in recognizing inappropriate and/or illegal employer interview questions and how to reply to them, were more valuable in assisting them in formulating questions they wanted to ask the employer at an interview, were more valuable in assisting them in obtaining a dental practice's demographic data, were more valuable in helping them determine a practice's philosophy, were more valuable in helping them investigate a dental practice's social media presence, were more valuable in making them aware of non-verbal body language, were more valuable in helping them select items to create a professional appearance, were more valuable in self-assessing their overall preparedness for an actual employment interview, and were more valuable in self-assessing their overall preparedness for an interview for a post-graduate, AEGD or GPR residency program position.

The greatest degree of statistical significance was seen for questions 3,4,5,9, and 10 where the Class of 2017, compared to the class of 2018 studentsw felt that the mock interviews were more valuable in assisting them in formulating questions they wanted to ask the employer at an interview, were more valuable in assisting them in obtaining a dental practice's demographic data, were more valuable in helping them determine a practice's philosophy, were more valuable in helping them select items to create a professional appearance, and were more valuable in self-assessing their overall preparedness for an actual employment interview.

For the Class of 2017, 25.7% of students received offers for job interviews prior to the mock interviews. For the Class of 2018, 3% received offers for job interviews prior to the mock interviews.

DISCUSSION

The mock interviews were well received by the Class of 2017. After changes were made to the mock employment interview protocol, the Class of 2018 did not find them as useful. The first mock employment interview conducted for the Class of 2017 had similar results as Everett-Gutmann's (1988) findings.[2] They found that students and faculty both took the interviews very seriously when the day arrived. The students found the interviews especially effective in preparing them to formulate questions for their future employer, recognizing inappropriate and illegal interview questions, and

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improving their professional appearance. Midwestern CDMI Class of 2018 students did not take the interviews as seriously as the Class of 2017. They scored every one of the first 11 questions lower than the prior year. This could be due to numerous factors: 1. the interviews took place an hour prior to clinical patient care unlike the prior year when an entire afternoon session was reserved exclusively for interviews; 2. there was no time for the students to dress the part of the interviewee or interviewer so they performed the interviews in their clinical scrubs; and 3. being interviewed by their peers, and friends, may not have placed them in the same frame of mind as when they were being interviewed by unfamiliar faculty with interview experience.

The Class of 2017 interview process required a very high faculty time commitment. Midwestern CDMI's curriculum committee decided that the faculty time required during the first iteration was not realistic, or sustainable, factoring in all commitments clinical faculty are required to meet. Total faculty hours utilized for the Class of 2018, required only 61 faculty hours, which was substantially less than the first iteration .

Faculty feedback was obtained during focus groups following the completion of the mock interviews. The Class of 2017 faculty focus group felt that despite the large time commitment, they had an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward the mock interview process. Some of this may be attributed to the fact that this was new material in the curriculum, and the faculty were excited to see the students participate in the mock employment interview process. The Class of 2018 faculty focus group had mixed reactions toward the process. Some faculty expressed that they saw great value in the students playing the role of a practice owner, while others felt that the students did not have the experience to formulate good interview questions as would a seasoned faculty member.

The Class of 2017 faculty were well informed about their fictitious practice, including the expectations they had for the new associate dentist they were hiring. Faculty business acumen also contributed to ad lib questions that complimented the information they were given during the calibration session. Some additional questions the faculty asked the students included questions pertaining to the breadth of patient care experiences they performed while in school, prior exposure and competency with dental technology, and their current efficiency in completing clinical procedures. Some students were asked how many teeth they could extract in an hour, whether they could manage a schedule of 30 patients per day, and whether they would mind travelling between numerous office locations from day to day. In contrast, when the Class of 2018 students played the role of the interviewer, they mostly repeated sample questions given to them during lecture, and the overall effect was more rehearsed.

A potential solution to the dilemma between faculty time availability, and student enrichment in the mock employment interview process, might be to ask for faculty and

student volunteers, and stage the mock interview process after hours, and outside the normal curriculum. This would allow for a return to the original format, which the students favored.

CONCLUSION

The mock employment interviews conducted for the Class of 2017 were more favorably received than the Class of 2018. Changes in the mock employment interview format from faculty doing the interviewing to the students doing the interviews most likely resulted in the students having less satisfaction with the process. Solutions for a balance between faculty availability and student experience needs to be investigated.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors have no financial, economic or professional interests that may have influenced the design, execution or presentation of this work.

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