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Professional Development Strategy for the Comprehensive General Dentist in the Management of Dentoalveolar Fractures

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the incidence of dentoalveolar fractures and the shortcomings in their comprehensive management serve as a starting point for investigating this topic.

Objective: to design a professional development strategy aimed at improving the performance of the comprehensive general dentist in the management of dentoalveolar fractures.

Methods: theoretical and empirical methods were employed to establish the foundations that led to systematizations and to diagnose the current state of professional performance of this specialist at the "Hermanos Cruz" Teaching Polyclinic in Pinar del Río.

Results: the strategy design is based on a system of actions that contributes to performance transformation through objective, flexible, and humanistic alternatives focused on continuous education, systematic knowledge updating, and the development of related skills and values. It is supported by theoretical foundations from philosophical, pedagogical, psychological, sociological perspectives, as well as from Medical Education and Maxillofacial Surgery.

Conclusions: the strategy's theoretical foundation contributes to Medical Education Sciences in general and to professional development in dentistry in particular, based on new relationships of subordination and coordination established among the components of the designed strategy. It enables the establishment of essential relationships that enrich theory in this field of knowledge. The proposed strategy structure aligns with the adopted foundations and contributes to the enhancement of the comprehensive general dentist's professional performance.

Keywords: Overcoming; Strategy; Professional Performance; Dentoalveolar Fracture, Comprehensive Care.

INTRODUCTION

"Strategy" is one of the terms most frequently used across nearly all human activities. Although numerous definitions exist, they all share the same ultimate purpose: achieving goals. The word "strategy" originates from the Greek *strategia*, meaning "the art of directing armies," derived from *stratōs* ("army") and *ago* ("to lead" or "to direct").⁽¹⁾ The term "strategy" began to be specifically employed in the pedagogical sciences during the 1960s, alongside research efforts focused on educational quality.⁽²⁾

In the pedagogical context: "Strategy establishes an intelligent direction—from a broad and global perspective—for actions aimed at solving problems identified within a specific segment of human activity. (...) Its design implies a dialectical articulation between objectives (desired goals) and methodology (the instrumental pathways to achieve them)".⁽²⁾

Researcher Valle Lima,⁽³⁾ considers strategy to be a set of sequential and interrelated actions that, starting from an initial state (diagnosis), guide the transition toward an ideal state resulting from planning. Valcárcel,⁽⁴⁾ defines a professional development strategy in the context of imaging technologists to improve performance in gynecological ultrasound procedures, particularly in support of laparoscopic surgery. Lescaille,⁽⁵⁾ defines a professional development strategy for specialists in Diagnostic Imaging and Medical Radiophysics in Ultrasound as a system of personalized actions implemented in postgraduate education. This process employs both conventional and advanced methods and procedures, aimed at transforming professional behavior with short-, medium-, and long-term objectives.

González,⁽⁶⁾ views professional development strategy as an integral process aimed at continuous improvement. Oviedo Rodríguez,⁽⁷⁾ agrees that strategies must be operationalized in practice. They actively involve participating individuals, are structured in phases or stages comprising concrete actions, and are based on management functions such as planning, organization, execution, and control. Furthermore, their implementation must produce an observable change or transformation in professional performance.

Similarly, Martí,⁽⁸⁾ states that "strategy consists of a short-, medium-, or long-term action plan, closely interrelated, which facilitates the achievement of objectives and goals (...) It is conceived as part of planning—that is, the anticipation of an achievable, realistic future. To this end, actions are materialized in daily practice, known as tactics." Candelaria,⁽⁹⁾ argues that "strategies entail the development of organized steps aimed at achieving their goals."

López Hurtado,⁽¹⁰⁾ understands strategy as a set of components applied to resolving specific problems within the professional development process, which must be ongoing and systematic. He emphasizes the need for health professionals to remain updated on scientific, technological, and socioeconomic advances, without overlooking the hygienic and epidemiological conditions affecting the population.

López Espinosa,⁽¹¹⁾ in systematizing Martínez's work, noted that "...the effectiveness of strategy implementation is facilitated by the achievement of the intended objectives, which are concretized in the expected changes. Clarity in the researcher's objectives is essential to properly direct the planned set of actions. Today, other authors assert that strategy is part of planning—the long-term vision—and is complemented by its daily operationalization."

Olivares,⁽¹²⁾ referred to the etymological analysis of the word “strategy,” emphasizing that strategies are intended for practical operationalization, actively involve participants in their execution, are structured through phases, stages, or moments that group actions according to management functions (planning, organization, execution, and control), and must reveal a change or transformation in participants’ performance upon implementation.

Reyes,⁽¹³⁾ operationally defined strategy as an artful means to achieve proposed objectives through a pre-established set of actions, planned and directed toward prior and subsequent assessment of the research object’s condition. Its implementation includes active participant involvement in transforming the situations under study through specific tasks, procedures, and actions aligned with established objectives and intended outcomes.

Marín,⁽¹⁴⁾ conceptualizes strategy as a multidimensional concept encompassing all critical organizational activities. Del Río Pérez,⁽¹⁵⁾ agrees with Martínez,⁽¹⁶⁾ that “in scientific research, strategies have held a fundamental place for several decades.” Specifically, in the current context, they represent deliberate, identified options based on problems requiring urgent resolution—thus playing a crucial role in developing and fulfilling professionals’ performance.

González,⁽¹⁷⁾ stated that “in the educational context, speaking of strategy means discussing alternatives and directional proposals to enhance the outcomes of the teaching–learning process (...), through educational alternatives proposed within the strategy.”

Various authors,^(2,15) view professional development strategies as integral processes for improving professional performance in addressing population health problems. Other cited authors,^(16,17,18,19) highlight as core characteristics of professional development strategies their dynamic, participatory, personalized nature and their orientation toward transforming performance in response to specific socio-technological and health-related needs.

In Cuba, postgraduate education constitutes a fundamental pillar within the higher education system, aimed at ensuring lifelong education for university professionals.⁽¹⁸⁾ Villareño Domínguez,⁽¹⁹⁾ emphasize that postgraduate development is directly linked to professional advancement: the higher the level of knowledge, the better the quality of medical care provided and the greater the satisfaction in clinical practice. In this sense, implementing strategies to strengthen the comprehensive general dentist’s (EGI) professional performance—particularly in areas such as dentoalveolar fracture (FDA) management—is essential to improving the quality of care. The incidence of dentoalveolar fractures among patients treated at the “Hermanos Cruz” Teaching Polyclinic represents a leading cause of tooth loss and results in aesthetic, functional, and psychological sequelae for these patients. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the EGI’s capacity in the comprehensive management of this type of trauma to reduce these negative outcomes through improved professional performance.

The aforementioned scientific investigations, the limited available literature, and the lead author’s experience as a researcher on this topic enabled the identification of the following **scientific problem:** *How can the professional development of comprehensive general dentists be supported to achieve better performance in the comprehensive dental management of dentoalveolar fractures?* This study aims to address this question through the following **objective:** To design a professional development strategy for improving the comprehensive general dentist’s professional performance in the management of dentoalveolar fractures.

METHODS

A descriptive longitudinal study was conducted involving 35 dentists specializing in Comprehensive General Dentistry (EGI) at the "Hermanos Cruz" Teaching Polyclinic and its outreach services to schools and Popular Councils in remote areas of the Pinar del Río municipality and province, between October 2023 and January 2025.

The objective was to design a professional development strategy to improve performance in the management of dentoalveolar fracture (FDA).

Population and sample: 35 active EGI specialists at the "Hermanos Cruz" University Teaching Polyclinic in Pinar del Río.

- Inclusion criteria: Practicing at the main center or its extensions and voluntarily agreeing to participate.
- Exclusion criteria: Professionals who ceased their specialist duties or were engaged in international medical missions during the study period.

Methods used

Theoretical methods

- Historical-logical
- Documentary analysis
- Analytical-synthetic
- Systematization
- Inductive-deductive
- Structural-functional systemic approach
- Modeling

Empirical methods

- Scientific observation
- Surveys
- Interviews with managers and experts
- Performance assessment

Single variable

- Improvement of the EGI's professional performance in FDA management, evaluated across five dimensions and corresponding indicators.

Proposed professional development strategy

- Theoretical foundations: Scientific principles guiding the design, implementation, and evaluation of educational strategies, integrated as a comprehensive system responsive to the country's social, scientific, and humanistic context.
- Objective: To transform knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- Guiding principles: Normative, integrative, and contextually relevant.

Stages:

1. Initial diagnosis
2. Planning
3. Implementation
4. Evaluation

The strategy establishes dialectical relationships among the components of its structure, thereby enhancing EGI professional performance and strengthening its connection with the area of practice. This structure incorporates elements validated and tested in various Cuban studies on professional development in medical education and dental care, demonstrating distinctive characteristics.

RESULTS

Structure of the professional development strategy for improving the performance of the comprehensive general dentist in the management of dentoalveolar fractures.

Theoretical foundations

The strategy is grounded in philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, medical education, and dental science principles. It promotes a humanistic and scientific approach, emphasizing the holistic development of the EGI, professional ethics, and continuous evidence-based updating.

Philosophical, epistemological, and ontological foundations

The strategy recognizes the EGI as a professional in continuous evolution, endowed with critical and reflective capacities. It is based on constructivist learning, oriented toward solving real clinical problems.⁽²⁰⁾

Ethical and humanistic foundation

Ontologically, the strategy acknowledges the EGI as a professional in constant development whose clinical practice must reflect a commitment to the patient's holistic well-being.⁽²¹⁾ This includes not only technical knowledge but also critical, reflective, and ethical competencies for decision-making in complex clinical situations such as FDA. Epistemologically, it is rooted in a constructivist learning approach,⁽²²⁾ viewing knowledge as a dynamic and active process in which the EGI builds understanding through clinical experience, evidence-based reflection, and continuous updating. Consequently, the professional development process must be participatory.⁽²³⁾

Sociological foundation

It underscores the social need to enhance EGI professional performance in FDA management, as all transformation arises from a societal need aligned with philosophical and sociological principles, considering social actors and the political context.

Psychological foundation

It aims to strengthen the professional's values, confidence, and empathy toward patients. Psychologically, it draws on the contextual dialectics of the historical-cultural approach, which posits that personal experiences and guided support facilitate internalization and externalization processes essential for learning.^(3,4,5) A consciously prepared professional can convey calmness, security, trust, and protection to patients and their families.

Pedagogical foundation

It views development as an integral educational process influenced by socio-educational factors. "Development responds to the internal regularities of the process in question, without disregarding socio-educational influence"⁽¹⁰⁾ Training is thus closely tied to the inherent regularities of the underlying educational process. The concept of development implies understanding the human being as a biological, spiritual, individual-communal, and historically conditioned entity.

Medical Education Sciences foundation

The actions proposed in the strategy demonstrate the practical viability of theory within the specific context. This foundation arises from the interaction of EGIs through scientific methods in delivering dental care. Such practice drives deeper scientific updating to bridge the gap identified in this research and reinforces workplace-based education. The proposed strategy incorporates the core principles of Medical Education Sciences, which include five epistemological pillars: workplace-based education as a guiding principle, humanism, internationalization, information and communication technologies, and lifelong continuing education.⁽¹⁹⁾

Stage 1: Diagnosis

Objectives:

1. Characterize EGI performance in FDA management.
2. Coordinate educational influences for professional development.

Actions:

- Assessment of clinical knowledge and motivation.
- Identification of training needs and available resources.
- Presentation of findings and active participation in designing interventions.

Stage 2: Planning

Objective: Design Specific Professional Development Activities (FOSP) for managing FDA patients.

Actions:

- Design of lectures, courses, training sessions, and workshops.
- Selection of technological resources and institutional approval.
- Development of a timeline and inter-institutional cooperation agreements.

Stage 3: Implementation

Objective: Execute the designed FOSP.

Actions:

- Delivery of training activities with a motivational focus.
- Integration of clinical care, teaching, and research.
- Promotion of active participation and institutional commitment.

Stage 4: Evaluation

Objective: Assess outcomes and changes in professional performance.

Actions:

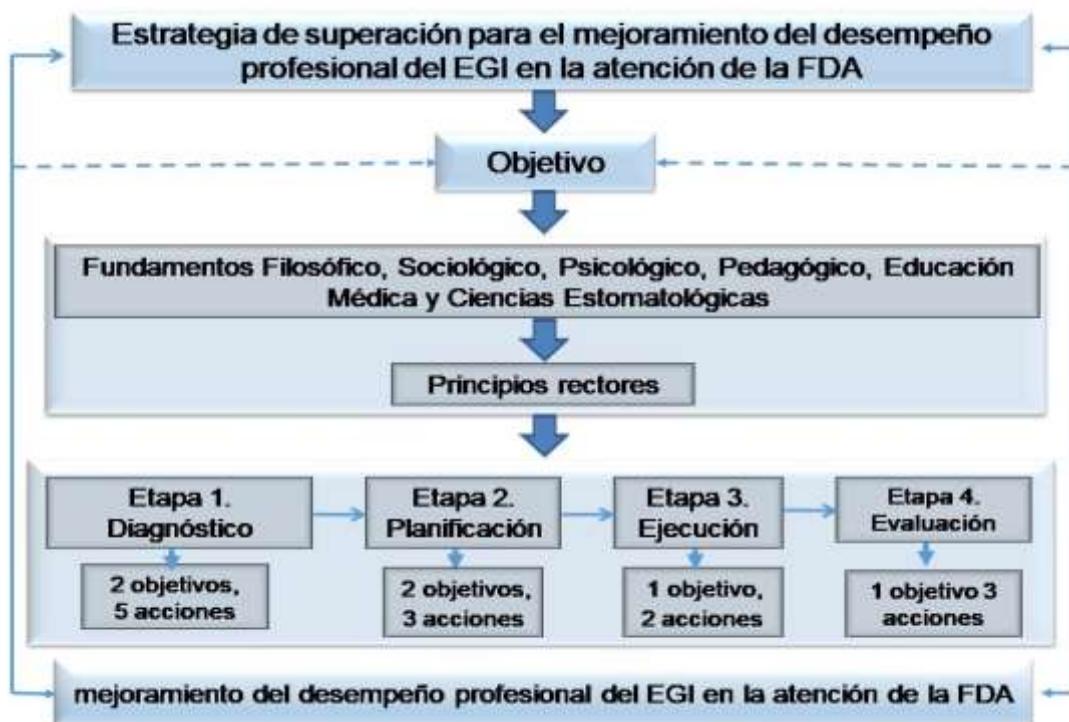
- Verification of implemented actions.
- Evaluation of successes, challenges, and professional transformation.
- Application of instruments to measure impact and guide necessary adjustments.

Essential relationships identified

- Cooperation between FOSP and clinical content.
- Hierarchical alignment between objectives and stages.
- Subordination of professional performance to strategic components.
- Coordination among theoretical foundations, guiding principles, and methodology.

Characteristics of the strategy

- Systemic: Integrates components and actions to enhance performance.
- Individualized: Accounts for the needs and potential of each EGI.
- Dynamic: Promotes developmental learning and continuous education.
- Flexible: Adapts organizational formats to contextual demands.
- Transdisciplinary: Connects disciplines, society, and policy.
- Contextualized: Responds to local characteristics and National Health System (SNS) needs.
- Humanistic: Centers on the holistic development of the human being.



Source: Authors' own elaboration. Year 2024.

Fig. 1. Graphical representation of the professional development strategy for improving the performance of the comprehensive general dentist (EGI) in the management of dentoalveolar fractures (FDA).

The actions included in the proposed strategy become practical alternatives that enable the improvement of EGI performance in FDA management through continuous and lifelong professional development. This approach allows professionals to update their knowledge and transform their practice. Its implementation contributes to enhancing the quality of dental care and increasing personal and family satisfaction. The professional development strategy for improving EGI performance in FDA management establishes guidelines for contextualization, dynamically interacting with all stakeholders involved and offering flexible, context-sensitive, and relevant actions for its successful execution.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the scientific validity of the professional development strategy for improving the performance of the comprehensive general dentist in the management of dentoalveolar fractures.

Theoretical validation through expert judgment

The Delphi method was applied with 19 experts from the Dentistry program at the University of Medical Sciences (UCM), selected based on their professional and academic experience. A questionnaire was used to evaluate the proposed strategy, its theoretical foundations, and its implementation. Experts unanimously agreed on the strategy's relevance, effectiveness, and appropriateness, highlighting its capacity to enhance EGI professional performance in FDA management.

Dissemination workshops

Two workshops were conducted with high-level academic professionals. In both, the strategy was positively assessed for its logical structure, methodological flexibility, and contribution to the development of professional values. Participants acknowledged its impact on postgraduate education and the quality of dental care.

Implementation through a case study

The strategy was applied to 15 EGIs at the "Hermanos Cruz" Polyclinic. The initial diagnosis revealed deficiencies in clinical and therapeutic knowledge. Specific Professional Development Activities (FOSP)—including lectures, training sessions, and workshops—were designed and adapted to the institutional context, supported by technological resources and academic mentorship. Implementation led to the consolidation of clinical, ethical, and communication skills, demonstrating measurable improvements in professional performance.

Results of the final performance assessment

Significant improvement was observed across all evaluated dimensions:

- Clinical care: 90 % demonstrated mastery of clinical skills.
- Research and self-development: 75 % engaged in self-directed learning activities.
- Educational role: 85 % exhibited strong communication and preventive education skills.
- Managerial capacity: 100 % showed effective teamwork and management abilities.
- Professional and human conduct: 100 % displayed ethics, empathy, and responsibility.

Comparison between initial and final diagnosis

The strategy transformed EGI performance across all dimensions, shifting from inadequate to adequate levels. Notable improvements were observed in professional ethics, motivation, clinical knowledge, and procedural skills. The effectiveness of the implemented actions and their positive impact on the care of patients with FDA were clearly evidenced.

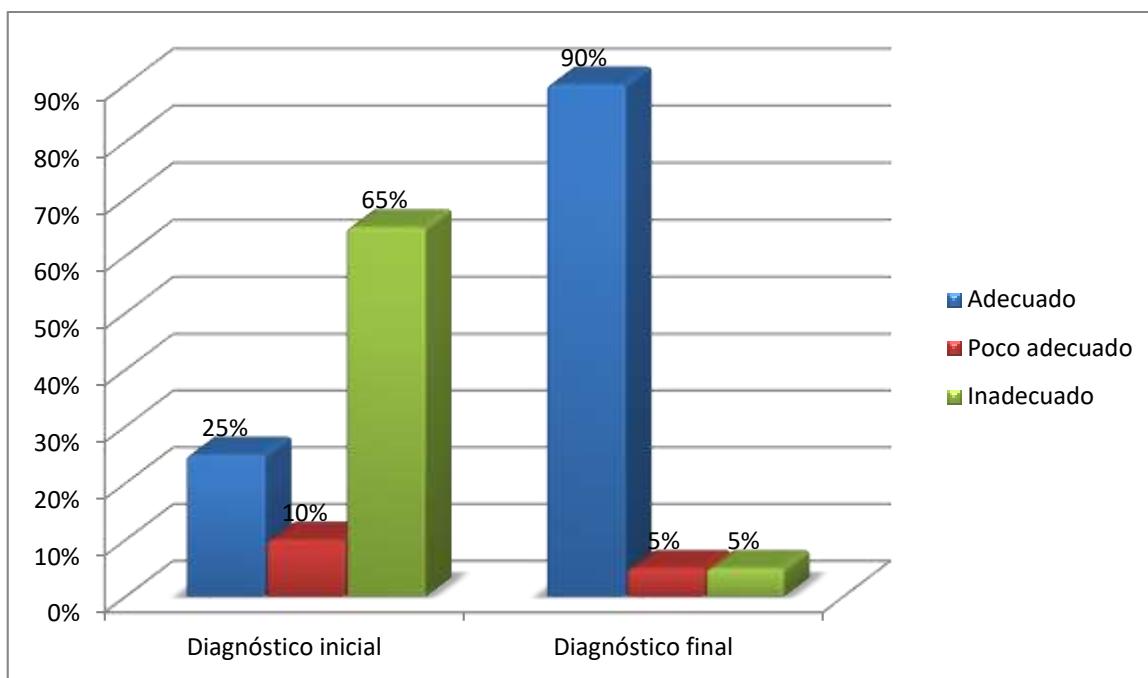


Fig. 2. Comparison of the variable's status between initial and final diagnosis.

The scale categories used here are defined by high-value thresholds. This approach reflects the understanding that the quality of care received by patients directly depends on the level of preparation of these EGIs.

CONCLUSIONS

The structure of the professional development strategy for improving the performance of the comprehensive general dentist in the management of dentoalveolar fractures integrates philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, medical, and dental science references. Grounded in Medical Education principles, it establishes essential theoretical relationships that contribute to knowledge development in this field and are operationalized through stages and actions that transform the initial state of the subject under study. The scientific validation of the proposed strategy confirmed its relevance and feasibility, demonstrating a tangible transformation in the performance of the participating professionals and a measurable improvement in the management of dentoalveolar fractures.

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