Learning Report

Elective Program at Institute of Dentistry, University of Turku (Finland)

24 to 28 February 2020

The elective programme at University of Turku has widen my horizon and has been an unforgettable experience. My previous elective experience was in Sri Lanka and Taipei. Thus, I was interested to know and compare the dental education systems between Asia and Europe. Furthermore, it was exciting to visit our Professor Matinlinna’s alma mater in Turku!

Institute of Dentistry in UTU adopts conventional lecture-based teaching while the University of Hong Kong is running problem-based learning. After observing the lessons and exchanging opinions with local students, I think both learning modes have its own pros and cons. Systemic lectures allow students to gain large amount of knowledge effectively with materials prepared by the teachers. Therefore, students can have a solid foundation of the subject. On the other hand, problem-based learning equips us with critical thinking skills as we have to look up relevant materials and digest on our own initially. Yet, guidance on the scope and depth of learning is greatly needed in problem-based learning.

Moreover, it was inspiring to see the liberal research environment in Finland, which offers scientists to conduct the research they wanted to do in a diverse and supportive setting. It was not surprising to see so many students and staff engaged in research in UTU. Because the preventive effect of xylitol on teeth decay was first discovered at the Institute of Dentistry of the UTU. In the elective programme, I met Dr. Liisa Lehto who is a PhD students and part-time clinic tutor at UTU. She is also a passionate researcher who believes that research is an indispensable part of dentistry. Dr Gürsoy, who is the director of the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Oral Sciences, again reminded me about the importance of research. Although oral microbiology appears to be distant from clinical dentistry, it has been a fundamental component of dentistry. Without the effort of researchers, there will not be new or more efficient treatments to oral diseases. Moreover, clinicians should always keep updated with new research findings from published journal articles.

Another highlight of the elective was meeting a semester exchange student Marieia, who is a final year dental student at the Universidad of Mayor (Brazil). This discussion about dental studies and career among students from Finland, Brazil and Hong Kong was fascinating. Although we are from different places, we face the same worries and struggles in dentistry. Different from the situation in Hong Kong, Marieia and students from Finland shared with us the problem of a surplus of dentists in their countries. In Brazil, most students graduated from private universities with high tuition fees, but not everyone is guaranteed with a job after graduation. Meanwhile, in Finland, the government has realized the problem a few years ago and decided to limit the quota in dental undergraduate programmes. In Hong Kong, as we are facing an ageing population, it is foreseeable that there will be increased demand for geriatric dental service. Unlikely that there will be comprehensive public dental services, as in Finland, I believe that the experience of dental care policies in other countries are significant and useful in improving the equality in dental care access in Hong Kong.
Performing access cavity on an extracted teeth

Professor evaluated each step of the procedure

Manufacturer’s preparation guide for ceramic restoration

Students were learning how to use the CAD-CAM software