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Current scenario on scope of Oral Pathology in Nepal: My perspective

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Nepal Medical Council (NMC) has recognized Oral pathology as a branch of dentistry and has categorized it as a non-clinical specialty.¹ The specialty of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology encompasses activities including laboratory services, basic research, teaching, and clinical patient care.² Unfortunately, the Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology in Nepal hasn't advanced as other branches. Nepalese Association of Oral Pathologists (NAOMP) recommends Universities in Nepal, the Nepal Medical Education Commission (MEC), and the NMC to emphasize the expansion of our specialty in clinical diagnosis and management.

Recently, Oral Pathologists have been going through a crisis. The crisis is due to a lack of job opportunities in academic positions in dental colleges; lack of research opportunities in dental colleges and involvement of general pathologists for diagnosing oral and maxillofacial lesions in most hospitals and diagnostic pathology laboratories- a situation similar in India.^{3,4} As per the author's information, every year one to two students each from three dental colleges in Nepal graduate in Oral pathology but the vacancies are not available. This has forced some of our budding Pathologists to restrict themselves to private practice and underutilization of their expertise. This may be because as per NMC accreditation standards for the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), the Dental-Clinical Sciences faculty requirement for an annual intake of 50 BDS Students annually for oral pathology is two in number.

The NAOMP recommends that NMC amend this requirement to at least two faculty in Oral Pathology for an annual intake of 30 students or at least one faculty each in Oral Pathology and Oral anatomy for annual intake of 30 students. Recently in Nepal, a single faculty has to be involved in teaching Oral pathology, Oral anatomy, and histology. Forensic Odontology, though falls in the spectrum of Oral Pathology is being covered by forensic medicine faculty. NAOMP recommends creating a nexus between forensic medicine and forensic Odontology and or Oral Pathology to facilitate learning forensic medicine/ Odontology. Dental/Oral anatomy histology and forensic Odontology can be made as separate departments to create job opportunities for Oral Pathologists.

Oral cancer is one of the common malignancies in Nepal. Furthermore, 4.6% of the global cancer burden is contributed by Nepal.⁵ Our country has a significant burden of oral cancer in regional cancer centers, but none of the cancer centers has employed doctors with MDS (Oral pathology) qualifications for the diagnosis of oral cancer. MDS oral pathology curriculum should be amended. Head and neck pathology should be integrated into the curriculum of MDS oral pathology in Nepal. Other diagnostic modalities such as routine hematology, serology, biochemistry, microbiology, and advanced molecular techniques should be incorporated into the Department of Oral Pathology.⁴

It is recommended to revise our curriculum to incorporate and open the avenues for clinical practice rather than research and academic activities alone and create job opportunities for budding oral pathologists.² NAOMP would like to request all the concerned stakeholders to focus on the highlighted concerns and facilitate us to overcome the challenges faced by our fraternity in Nepal.

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