



NABH ACCREDITATION FOR DENTAL COLLEGES IN INDIA

Dentistry

Dr. Manjula S*

MDS Reader, Department of oral & maxillofacial surgery JSS Dental College and Hospital JSS Academy of Higher Education & Research Mysore-570015, Karnataka, India *Corresponding Author

Dr. Deepak S

MDS Reader, Department of oral & maxillofacial surgery R V College of Dental Sciences Bangalore, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH), a constituent board of the Quality Council of India (QCI), provides accreditation programmes designed to improve the quality and safety of healthcare services in India. Dental colleges function as both educational institutions and healthcare facilities, providing clinical training to students while delivering preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic dental services to the public. Therefore, implementing quality assurance systems in dental teaching hospitals is essential for patient safety, infection prevention, effective clinical governance, and the standardisation of dental care. NABH has developed specific accreditation standards for Dental Healthcare Service Providers (DHSPs), including dental teaching institutions, dental hospitals, and clinics.¹ These standards address patient-centred care, organisational management, human resources, facility safety, infection control, documentation, and continuous quality improvement.² This article discusses the importance, major standards, implementation process, benefits, challenges, and future scope of NABH accreditation in dental colleges in India.

KEYWORDS

Nabh, Dental Colleges, Accreditation, Quality Assurance, Patient Safety, Infection Control, Dental Education, Dental Teaching Hospitals.

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance in healthcare is an essential component of modern dental education and clinical practice. Dental colleges provide a unique healthcare environment in which undergraduate and postgraduate students acquire clinical competencies under the supervision of qualified faculty members. At the same time, these institutions manage a large number of patients requiring a variety of dental procedures, ranging from routine oral prophylaxis to complex oral surgical interventions.

The high volume of patients, frequent use of sharp instruments, exposure to blood and saliva, generation of biomedical waste, and requirement for sterilisation make dental teaching hospitals particularly important settings for systematic quality management. Inadequate infection control, improper documentation, insufficient patient communication, and inconsistent clinical protocols may compromise patient safety and the quality of clinical training.

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) addresses these concerns through a structured accreditation framework for dental healthcare service providers.^{1,3} The programme is intended to promote standardised healthcare delivery, improve patient safety, and establish a culture of continuous quality improvement. For dental colleges, accreditation is particularly relevant because it connects clinical service delivery with institutional accountability. It encourages the development of systems in which patient care, clinical teaching, administrative responsibilities, and quality monitoring operate within a coordinated framework.

Overview of NABH Accreditation

NABH is a constituent board of the Quality Council of India that establishes and operates accreditation programmes for healthcare organisations. Its accreditation framework evaluates whether an organisation has established appropriate policies, procedures, and systems and whether these are effectively implemented in practice.⁴

The NABH Dental Healthcare Service Providers Accreditation Programme is specifically designed for dental healthcare facilities, including teaching institutions, dental hospitals, and eligible dental clinics.^{1,3} The standards provide a framework for quality assurance and improvement in both government and private dental facilities.

Accreditation is not simply the preparation of manuals or the display of certificates. It requires evidence that the institution consistently follows established procedures and monitors their effectiveness. This includes staff awareness, clinical records, sterilisation monitoring, patient feedback, incident reporting, internal audits, and corrective actions.

Dental colleges should recognise that NABH accreditation and regulatory approval of a dental educational institution serve different purposes. Accreditation focuses on the quality and safety of healthcare services, whereas compliance with applicable Dental Council of India regulations and other statutory requirements governs the institution's regulatory obligations. NABH accreditation should complement, rather than replace, these requirements.

NABH Accreditation Standards Applicable to Dental Colleges

NABH dental standards are organised into patient-centred and organisation-centred domains. These domains provide a systematic framework for assessing the quality of dental services and the management systems supporting them.^{1,2}

Patient-centred standards

Access, Assessment and Continuity of Care (AAC): Dental colleges should establish a systematic process for patient registration, appointment scheduling, clinical assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, referral, and follow-up. Appropriate triage and prioritisation of emergencies are essential in teaching hospitals with high patient attendance.

Care of Patients (COP): This domain focuses on the delivery of safe, appropriate, and effective dental treatment. Departments should follow documented clinical protocols for procedures such as restorative dentistry, endodontics, periodontics, oral surgery, prosthodontics, orthodontics, and paediatric dentistry. Clinical supervision of undergraduate and postgraduate students is particularly important.

Patient Rights and Education (PRE): Patients must receive understandable information about their diagnosis, proposed treatment, alternatives, potential risks, and expected outcomes. Informed consent, confidentiality, respectful communication, and a mechanism for handling grievances are essential components of patient-centred dental care.

Management of dental materials, medication and equipment:

Dental colleges must maintain systems for the procurement, storage, use, and monitoring of dental materials, medicines, and clinical equipment. This includes checking expiry dates, maintaining storage conditions, monitoring equipment performance, and ensuring the availability of emergency drugs and essential supplies.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC): Policies should cover hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, instrument cleaning, sterilisation, disinfection of clinical surfaces, sharps management, occupational exposure, and biomedical waste handling.^{2,5}

Organisation-centred standards

Patient Safety and Quality Improvement (PSQI): A dental teaching hospital should establish a quality improvement programme that identifies risks, monitors clinical performance, investigates incidents, and implements corrective and preventive actions. Regular audits and review of patient complaints help identify gaps in care.

Responsibilities of Management (ROM): The college management must define responsibilities, reporting relationships, and accountability for clinical services and quality assurance. A designated quality team or committee can coordinate accreditation activities across departments.

Facility Management and Safety (FMS): The institution should maintain safe clinical infrastructure, appropriate ventilation and lighting, fire safety measures, emergency exits, equipment maintenance schedules, electrical safety, and accessible patient facilities. Radiation safety arrangements are also important wherever dental radiography is performed.

Human Resource Management (HRM): Staff members should have appropriate qualifications, defined job responsibilities, induction training, competency assessment, and continuing professional development. Students, interns, faculty, technicians, and support staff should receive role-specific training in infection control and emergency response.

Information Management System (IMS): Accurate clinical documentation is necessary for continuity of care, legal accountability, clinical teaching, and quality monitoring. Patient records should include medical and dental histories, examination findings, diagnosis, treatment plans, consent, treatment provided, prescriptions, and follow-up details. Access to records should be controlled to protect patient confidentiality.^{1,3}

Major Areas of Implementation in Dental Teaching Hospitals

Infection control and sterilisation: Dental procedures may expose patients and healthcare workers to blood, saliva, contaminated instruments, and aerosols. Therefore, an effective infection prevention programme must be implemented consistently across all clinical departments.^{5,6} Essential measures include written infection prevention policies; hand hygiene and appropriate personal protective equipment; separation of contaminated, clean, and sterilised instruments; validated cleaning, packaging, sterilisation, and storage; monitoring sterilisation cycles with appropriate indicators; maintaining records and managing failed cycles; cleaning dental chairs and clinical contact surfaces between patients; and training in sharps safety and occupational exposure. Centralised sterilisation facilities, where appropriate, can improve standardisation and traceability.

Biomedical waste management: Dental colleges generate infectious waste, sharps, extracted teeth, contaminated materials, and chemical waste. The institution should implement waste segregation at the point of generation, appropriate colour-coded containers, safe sharps disposal, suitable temporary storage, staff training, and authorised disposal arrangements in accordance with applicable biomedical waste regulations.⁷ Regular audits should assess practices in all departments, including oral surgery, periodontics, endodontics, prosthodontics, radiology, and dental laboratories.

Patient rights and informed consent: Dental teaching hospitals must protect patient autonomy and dignity while facilitating clinical education. Patients should be informed when students participate in their care, and clinical procedures should be performed under appropriate supervision. Consent should be obtained before relevant examinations and procedures, with particular attention to surgical interventions, local anaesthesia, radiographic investigations, and other procedures requiring specific consent. Patient photographs and clinical records used for teaching or research should be handled in accordance with applicable consent, confidentiality, and institutional policies.

Clinical documentation and record management: Comprehensive records are essential because several students, interns, postgraduate trainees, and faculty members may participate in a patient's treatment. A standardised clinical record system should capture the patient's history, diagnosis, treatment plan, consent, procedure details,

prescriptions, referrals, and follow-up. Records should be legible, traceable to the responsible clinician or supervised student, and stored securely. Periodic record audits can identify missing entries, inadequate consent documentation, incomplete treatment plans, and failures in follow-up.

Staff competency and student supervision: Accreditation should involve all categories of personnel, not only administrators or quality officers. Faculty members should understand relevant standards and communicate requirements to students and interns. The college should maintain records of staff qualifications, professional registration where applicable, training attendance, competency assessments, and emergency preparedness exercises. Clinical supervisors should ensure students undertake procedures appropriate to their demonstrated competence and institutional authorisation.

Emergency preparedness and facility safety: Dental colleges should be prepared to manage medical emergencies such as syncope, anaphylaxis, hypoglycaemia, and other acute events during treatment. Emergency protocols should identify responsible personnel, available equipment and medications, referral arrangements, and communication procedures. Periodic mock drills should assess response times, staff awareness, equipment readiness, and escalation. Facility safety measures should include preventive maintenance, fire drills, electrical safety checks, radiation protection, and appropriate arrangements for patients with disabilities.

Procedure for Obtaining NABH Accreditation

The accreditation process involves institutional commitment, implementation of applicable standards, self-assessment, external assessment, and corrective action. The college should refer to the current NABH standards and programme documents before initiating the process.^{3,8}

1. Obtain the applicable NABH standards: Identify the appropriate Dental Healthcare Service Provider category for the teaching hospital and obtain the applicable edition of the standards.

2. Establish a quality management team: Appoint a quality coordinator and constitute a multidisciplinary committee involving management, faculty, infection control personnel, clinical support staff, and administration.

3. Conduct a baseline gap analysis: Compare existing policies, clinical practices, infrastructure, documentation, and statutory compliance with applicable accreditation requirements.

4. Develop and implement policies: Prepare or revise standard operating procedures, clinical protocols, consent forms, infection control procedures, emergency plans, and quality indicators.

5. Train staff and students: Conduct induction and periodic training, maintain attendance records, and assess competency where appropriate.

6. Maintain implementation evidence: Implement the standards for the required period, conduct internal audits, document corrective actions, and complete self-assessment.

7. Submit the application and undergo assessment: Apply through the official NABH programme, complete any optional pre-assessment, and participate in the applicable external assessment.

8. Address non-conformities and maintain compliance: Submit corrective-action evidence as required, maintain accreditation conditions, undergo surveillance, and apply for renewal according to the applicable accreditation cycle.

NABH's published implementation guidance has described a minimum standards-implementation period and edition-specific assessment arrangements. Institutions should confirm the current minimum implementation period, accreditation cycle, assessment requirements, and validity conditions directly with NABH before applying.^{8,9}

Role of the Quality Assurance Committee

A dedicated quality assurance committee coordinates accreditation activities and ensures standards are implemented consistently. The

committee should conduct regular internal audits of clinical departments; review sterilisation and infection control practices; monitor patient complaints and satisfaction; analyse clinical incidents, near misses, and adverse events; review documentation and informed consent; monitor equipment maintenance and calibration where applicable; organise staff training and emergency drills; track corrective and preventive actions; and review quality indicators.

Quality indicators should be relevant to the institution's clinical activities and should have clearly defined numerators, denominators, reporting intervals, and responsible personnel. Examples include sterilisation monitoring compliance, clinical record completeness, informed consent compliance, patient complaint resolution time, staff training compliance, biomedical waste segregation compliance, and emergency drill performance. Targets should be established according to applicable standards, institutional risk assessment, and baseline performance rather than adopting arbitrary figures.

Benefits of NABH Accreditation for Dental Colleges

Improved patient safety: Accreditation promotes consistent clinical procedures, safer instrument processing, improved emergency preparedness, and more reliable documentation. Standardised processes can reduce preventable errors and strengthen management of clinical risks.^{1,5}

Improved quality of dental education: Students trained in an environment that follows documented protocols become familiar with professional accountability, patient rights, infection prevention, and evidence-based clinical practice. Accreditation can support the development of quality-conscious dental professionals.

Increased patient confidence: Transparent procedures, appropriate consent, respectful communication, and accessible grievance mechanisms may improve patients' confidence in the institution. NABH accreditation provides external recognition that the organisation has been assessed against defined healthcare standards.¹⁰

Better administrative efficiency: Defined responsibilities, standardised forms, equipment maintenance schedules, and systematic audits can reduce duplication and improve coordination between departments.

Continuous quality improvement: Accreditation encourages regular evaluation rather than one-time compliance. Internal audits, performance indicators, incident reviews, and corrective actions allow institutions to identify weaknesses and monitor improvements over time.

Greater organisational accountability: Accreditation helps establish clear lines of responsibility for management, faculty, clinical personnel, and support services. It can also support benchmarking and demonstrate an institutional commitment to quality. However, accreditation alone does not guarantee superior clinical outcomes; benefits depend on sustained implementation rather than certificate acquisition.

Challenges in Implementing NABH Accreditation

Financial constraints: Infrastructure improvements, staff training, sterilisation equipment, documentation systems, and maintenance activities require financial resources.

Resistance to change: Staff and students may initially perceive standardised documentation and audits as additional administrative work.

High patient load: Large patient volumes and busy clinical departments may make it difficult to maintain consistent documentation, appointment management, and infection control practices.

Staff turnover and student rotation: Frequent changes in students, interns, and trainees necessitate repeated induction and competency-based training.

Documentation burden: Maintaining complete, accurate, and retrievable records across multiple departments requires a coordinated information management system.

Sustaining compliance: Some institutions may concentrate on preparing for external assessment rather than maintaining everyday adherence to standards. These challenges can be addressed through phased implementation, leadership support, clear assignment of responsibilities, periodic training, digital documentation where appropriate, and integration of quality indicators into routine departmental activities.

Recommendations for Effective Implementation

9. Obtain explicit commitment from institutional management and the principal.
10. Assign a multidisciplinary quality team with defined responsibilities.
11. Prioritise patient safety, infection prevention, and statutory compliance during the initial gap analysis.
12. Develop practical standard operating procedures that staff and students can follow.
13. Integrate quality training into student induction, internship orientation, and faculty development.
14. Establish a regular internal audit schedule for every clinical department.
15. Use measurable quality indicators and review trends during management meetings.
16. Encourage non-punitive reporting of incidents and near misses, while ensuring appropriate accountability.
17. Maintain a central system for tracking corrective actions, equipment maintenance, training, and accreditation evidence.
18. Review the latest NABH standards and official assessment policies before every major accreditation milestone.

Future Scope of NABH Accreditation in Dental Education

The future of accreditation in dental education lies in integrating quality management into everyday clinical and academic activities. Digital patient records, electronic audit systems, barcode-based instrument traceability, automated appointment systems, and dashboards for quality indicators may improve monitoring and accountability.

Dental colleges can also use accreditation as a foundation for strengthening research ethics, patient-centred education, clinical governance, and evidence-based practice. Greater collaboration between quality committees, academic departments, and hospital administration can help ensure that accreditation requirements become part of institutional culture.

Future evaluations should examine whether accreditation is associated with measurable improvements in infection prevention compliance, documentation quality, patient experience, clinical safety, and student competency. Such evaluations would provide stronger evidence of the programme's impact on dental education and healthcare delivery.

CONCLUSION

NABH accreditation provides a structured framework for improving the quality and safety of healthcare services delivered by dental teaching institutions. By addressing patient rights, infection prevention, clinical documentation, staff competency, facility safety, and continuous quality improvement, accreditation can strengthen the management of dental teaching hospitals while supporting professional training.

Successful implementation requires active participation from institutional leadership, faculty, students, clinical personnel, and administrative teams. Most importantly, accreditation should be viewed as an ongoing quality improvement process rather than a one-time administrative achievement. When incorporated into routine clinical and academic practice, it can contribute to safer patient care, greater accountability, and a stronger culture of quality in dental education.

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