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Can undergraduate student learning in prevention influence oral health self-care practices? A report from a South African University

Introduction: Student attitudes and behavior towards their own oral health status could reflect their understanding of the importance of oral health promotive activities.

Study Objectives: This was a qualitative and exploratory study designed to gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which the undergraduate curriculum could act as an enabler for student oral health self-care practices.

Methods: Data collection comprised of document analysis (curriculum review) and in-depth face-to-face interviews with undergraduate dental therapy and oral health students and academic staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Ten students volunteered to participate in the study while five academic staff were purposively selected. A separate interview schedule was developed for students and staff respectively. The emergent themes from document analysis were compared to the analyzed data from the interviews.

Results: The curriculum was underpinned by a strong foundation in prevention, and there was consensus among respondents that the curriculum met the needs for undergraduate training in preventive dentistry. The following themes emerged from data analysis: curriculum support for self-care practices; depth and scope of clinical training; role of clinical supervisors and challenges in clinical training. Respondents agreed that the curriculum could influence students' attitudes towards self-care practices such as tooth brushing and flossing but that academic responsibilities and clinical contact time placed constraints on these practices.

Conclusion: The undergraduate curriculum does provide support for enabling student knowledge acquisition and positive attitudes, but more effort is required to enable oral health behavioral modifications among students

Biography

Shenuka Singh is a Senior Lecturer and Academic Leader (Head) in the discipline of Dentistry at UKZN. She has a Doctoral degree in the field of Dental Public Health, a Master's degree (MSc Dent.) and a primary degree in Oral Hygiene. In addition, she has been appointed as Acting College Dean for Teaching and Learning at the College of Health Sciences, UKZN. She is involved in both undergraduate teaching and postgraduate research. She is the appointed Research Ethics Chair in Social Sciences and Humanities at UKZN and at Council for Science and Industry Research in South Africa (CSIR). She has published in both national and international journals.

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