

Stress in Dentistry: A Review

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Abstract

Dentists are prone to have different kinds of mental, physical, psychological and financial complications related to stress. It is important for the dentists to de-stress themselves by a reduction in the number of stressors and increase the ability to deal with stressful situations. The practices like resisting stress as well as time management and choosing goals which are similar to real-life scenario should be encouraged. So that stress can be reduced to a tolerable level. Like any profession, the transition from academics to the workplace could be a challenging task. As it is known that dental care professionals have responsibility for the health status of general people. So, there is a need for stress management and reduction programs to be integrated into dental education, which can provide practical solutions for curtailing various types of stress. Here we will know how to promote and enhance the well-being of the dentists by understanding the value of life.

Keywords: Stress, anxiety, depression, dentist, dentistry

Introduction

It is frequently assumed that dental professionals have a soothing career but, the fact is that, various stressful situations can cause worry in dental professionals. Usually dentistry is perceived as monotonous and stressful¹. It has been expressed by experienced dental professionals that, it increases stress level to a negative peak but also hampers daily activities which include personal relationships, leading to early retirement². Psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, narcotic abuse, and various health problems such as heart attacks, strokes, fluctuations in weight and professional burnout could be tied to stress points in dentistry^{2,3}.

In the dental profession the stress may set in from the beginning that is, while studying to qualify as a dentist. Various studies have been conducted which have concluded that dental student has more stress compared to any other professional education⁴. This stress keeps intensifying with each year of study⁵. Stress may come from various external factors such as physical, mental and psychological well-being. Hence stress must already set in even before qualifying as a dentist. Therefore, only a few perfectionists may seem to continue their career with an academic track record of excellence. After completing the qualification, the stress usually reduces in other professions but here it only increases due to the financial pressure of setting up and keeping the dental practice running. Post completion of graduation, a person is stressed to find an employer to settle any educational loans taken and it will keep on increasing along with various new debts which have an impact on psychological and emotional shades of life.⁶

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While, restoring the clinical, functional, and structural aspects of a dental career, consequences could be due to as extreme stress levels leading to numerous complications like panic attacks, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, health disorders like cardiac problems,

early stroke, variations in weight and professional burnout. Dental professionals have a chance of having musculoskeletal issues because of less working pace, continuously working in the same posture and impaired vision due to continue concentrating on the oral cavity. If a dentist has his/her dental clinic, then he/she is anxious about dealing with various expenses, like dealing with staff and co-workers, lab bills and payments for rent at time. Dentist is worried about their professional liability⁷.

In the study conducted on dental professionals by Sumaya Basudan., et al (2017)⁸, it was observed that 55.9% of the respondents had abnormal levels of depression, 66.8% had anxiety and 54.7% had stress, Severe and extremely severe scores for depression, anxiety, and stress were reported in 20.2%, 34.0% and 20.2% of respondents, respectively⁸.

How to suppress stress: The impact of stress on an individual can be broadly divided into two parts. One is the usual meaning it carries which leads to depression by lack of motivation and the other one is in a good way. The latter one affects a person positively where he/she can concentrate his/her energies in a specific direction to simplify various problems or situations by uplifting career or achieving any goals. But the former one is the matter of concern that needs to be addressed by various stress management method, like constant motivation.

Physical Stress: Good health is the key to reducing stress in any field, however, a dental practitioner requires strength, flexibility, endurance and coordination. So, it is necessary to maintain a decent physical and mental health by eating healthy meals, getting a sound sleep, and doing adequate exercise. Exercise, enables your body to perform well, and also have psychological benefits. Exercises to help in stretching of the muscles that support the spine. Walking or swimming are also highly recommended⁹. These practices lessen the physical stress to a significant level and increase productivity in professional lives. For spinal problems, correcting postures in between time intervals, relaxation during work sessions, could be utilized¹⁰.

Psychological stress: Students and faculty should be made aware of psychological stress associated with dentistry very early in their careers. Initial signs and symptoms of anxiety or depression would be identified and addressed at the earliest. A health professional should try to solve this issue on his/her own. As a doctor

we should recognize the problem at the beginning and understand the necessity of mental health, besides being with friends and family can help to be emotionally stable and get moral support. Similarly, taking vacations is a boon for a dentist. To reduce stress, deep breathing and muscle relaxation should be practiced routinely. The dentist can also discuss with their peers regarding the improvement of the work environment at the clinic, dental practice and management processes, and expertise in method for effective control over patient anxiety. Health professionals should take leisurely breaks sensibly or holidays from busy work life, as it relaxes the brain as well as the body¹¹.

Financial Stress: A dentist may lack financial skills to manage all the monetary issues. Not receiving payments in time for their services can lead to anxiety about their future. It is recommended to hire a financial advisor, who can help you in various possible ways to manage your monetary aspect in exchange for a small management fee. It will be time-saving as well as convenient. A few steps to consider in refinancing your student loans at a different lender so that the money you need to provide every monthly payment interest will be lower. It could help you to reduce your financial stress and guide you for future loans. A person should not make dentistry, as their only source of income, he should invest generously in various investment programs. This can help to reduce the financial pressure to a great extent. In all these things one should also consider that time is equally important as the value of money and make the financial decision wisely to lead a balanced work life⁷.

Stress coping mechanisms: In the study conducted on dental professionals by Sumaya Basudan., et al (2017)⁸, the authors illustrate different mechanisms to cope with stress. The most common method for coping with stress was activities such as watching movies, studying novels, sound sleep and shopping with friends (71%), followed by emotional support from others (53%). Under other mechanisms, intake of food or drinks and going on a vacation was mentioned by some⁸.

Coping with stress: When dentists are compared with doctors, they consider it as a personal insult. Working in their scheduled routine dental practices for long hours leads to a frustrating life¹². It is known that stress is not good for health so it leads to many issues such as ulcer, colitis, back pain, eye strain, marital disharmony, and even suicide¹³. Significance of high-stress levels was evident in the survey conducted on

UK dentists, where responses showed that 17.6% of all respondents had seriously thought about committing suicide at some point in their lives, which was compared to a recent survey conducted on UK dentists by Dr. Vicki Collin, et al (2019)¹⁴, which found that 20.6% of the normal population had reported suicidal thoughts came to their mind, moreover the researchers found that dentists showed higher levels of suicidal thought than the normal population, among them whomever said that they thought of attempting suicide is 57.7% last 12 months. The high levels of self-reported stress, burnout and psychological stress found are a serious concern for the dentists¹⁴. Stress is a well-known factor for mood swings, mental disorders, and suicide risk due to negative life events. Not every person can cope with the same pressure, and that leads to the risk of developing depression and suicidal thinking¹⁵. It can also cause absenteeism, personal anger, jealousy, low productivity, and increase complaints at work place¹⁶. Due to running behind schedule sometimes any kind of work-related comments by colleagues may lead to inferiority feelings, discouragement, self-doubt on abilities to work and lack of self-confidence can cause emotional fall out¹⁷.

How to manage stress: Stress can be reduced by expressing feelings verbally, mainly the negative thoughts like anger and sadness, listening to music for relaxation of mind, as it helps to calm anger and spread positivity¹⁸. Good social network is equally important with family members, friends, any other contacts like doctors, colleagues, etc, as it will assist at the time of need. If someone will use his/her past experiences and knowledge, they can tackle problems easily in different situations. As a dentist, there may be many unpredictable situations and we have to tackle it by using self-management skills and problem-solving behaviour¹⁹. Always try to create innovative ways to deal with the current situation, boost self-confidence by developing personal growth, learning new things, or collecting new information regarding arts such as literature, music, and painting¹⁸. As health professionals, we have a duty towards society to meet their expectations because we are offering services to the community. Dentists should know how to improve the skill of communication, listening, and have financial and business management knowledge too²⁰. For managing apprehensive patients, some stress releasing procedures such as relaxation, hypnosis, desensitization, coping therapy could be useful²¹. Awareness to understand emotions and means to cope with them by self-control is essential.

Professional and patient relationship should be good enough to avoid stressful environments¹⁹. Minimize the impact of negative thinking and maximize the positive thinking.

To summarize the preventive measures that can be implemented are:

- Improvement in work environment
- Don't stay alone and discuss issues with colleagues
- Utilize time wisely and take breaks
- Learn how to manage patients fear and anxiety
- Attend programs in stress management
- Do one thing at a time, Create time for yourself
- Initiate outside interests
- Listen actively, Talk less and more slowly
- Regular physical exercises
- Relax mind and listen to music
- Say no to the unachievable
- Do breathe in and out technique repeatedly
- Less demand for efforts and be kind to yourself²².

Don't try to become perfect, sometimes it is fine to be satisfied with whatever you have. Accept the fact that no one can have control over everything in life.

Conclusion

As the problem of anxiety and depression is faced by both students and professionals at some point in time, it is important to identify various symptoms to improve psychological well-being. These strategies may be implemented early in dental schools for improving student's lives, prevent premature dropout and the same can help a person in their profession at a later age. This ensures curtailing of all further kinds of complications that may set in after completion of the qualification, hence it can improve both quantity and quality of the work-life significantly⁸.

So, overall, we can say everyone is susceptible to stress. Although the dental career is tremendously stressful, but if proper measures are taken in proper time one can reduce the stress to a bearable limit. Identifying the sources of your stress, then eliminating the problems to get solutions over your stressor is advisable. Remembering to be kind to yourself and try to

push your limits can help to reduce stress. Like any other profession dentistry can be considered as a marathon, where one should try to live with it instead of trying to escape from it. Dentists are susceptible to professional burnout, anxiety attacks and clinical misery. Stress can't be eradicated from dentistry but it can be minimized to some extent. Key to manage stress is finding out the root cause to know the problem properly and try to solve it. If the cause is identified then preventive measures or precautions can be taken⁷.

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