

# Need for practice management in undergraduate dental program - A cross sectional survey among the dentists

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## ABSTRACT

Advancement in technology, enhancement of knowledge, elevated expectations from the patients regarding the quality of treatment, and economic factors are emerging as challenges to dentists, which demand emerging dentists to have skills on patient management and leadership through an improved curriculum. The aim of the present study was to conduct a survey among dentists regarding the need for practice management in undergraduate dental program. A total of 100 dentists from Chennai were involved in the study. They were made to answer 15 questions which were circulated online. The obtained data were statistically analyzed using SPSS software. It is evident that the majority of the dentists emphasize on including practice management courses in the undergraduate dental program as it may be helpful for the budding dentists in their future private practices. It can be concluded that the opinion of the dentists is strong and beneficial and should be considered.

**Key words:** Dental practice, dentists, innovative technology, practice management

## INTRODUCTION

Communication skills, management of staff and patients, teamwork, conflict management, and economy management, as well as all the other qualities can be inculcated to dental students through a practice management course.<sup>[1]</sup> Anyway, the current dental curriculum does not include principles on practice administration and effective patient management. The evidence from previous reports suggests that dental students lack confidence to set up a private practice, especially during the initial days of their blooming career.<sup>[2-6]</sup>

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After graduating, many dentists pursue a career in private or government institutions or abroad. Irrespective of the place of work, a dentist with an undergraduate would benefit from a proper leadership course.<sup>[7]</sup>

Previous studies clearly explain the hurdles faced by dentists at the start of their career. A survey conducted in the US states that dental practitioners had very low awareness level on the commercial aspect of dental practice, human resource management, insurance, and legal aspects of dentistry.<sup>[8]</sup> Another study conducted in France suggests time management skills and administrative skills presented as a challenge to many dentists during their initial days.<sup>[9]</sup>

Likewise, private practitioners were worried about not only the management of economical and legal matters but also the occupational health problems faced by practitioners in Mexico.<sup>[10]</sup> Dentists in the UK recommend to include topics relevant to business and practice management so

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that future dentists would not have to struggle to deal with those issues.<sup>[11]</sup> In India, only a small portion of dentists have attended practice management courses in their undergraduate program, and many colleges still lack adequate training in this topic because of which private practitioners struggle with management and efficiency in managing the patients.

Private practitioners in Malaysia emphasize on the need to stress the importance of skills on practice management among dental students.<sup>[12]</sup> In Iran, more than half of the dentists suggested practice management courses to be highly beneficial in their careers and the other half emphasized on the need for training.<sup>[13]</sup>

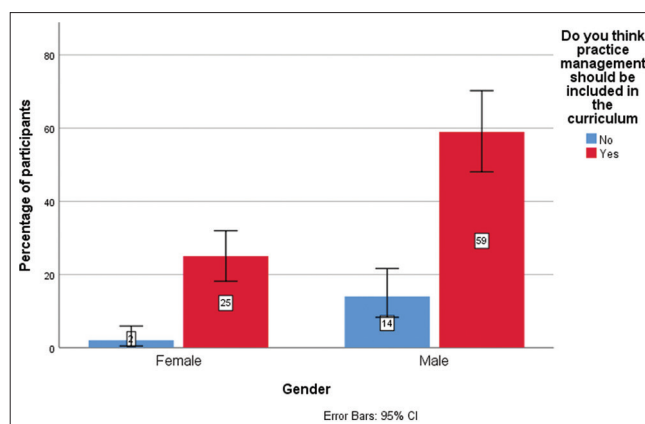
There is a deficiency of articles that deal with the importance of practice management courses in the undergraduate dental program and also particularly in the Indian population. Our team has extensive knowledge and research experience that has translate into high-quality publications.<sup>[14-33]</sup> Hence, the aim of the study is to assess the need for practice management courses in undergraduate dental programs among dentists. It is important to consider the opinions given by practitioners to frame a proper practice management course with the current trends and demands presented to a dentist in his/her dental practice.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was designed as a cross-sectional survey among practicing general dentists in Chennai city. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board before the start of the study (IHEC/SDC/PEDO/21/002). A self-administered questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was created based on the summary of previous studies alongside with the inclusion of current demands in the dental profession. The duration of the study was about 7 days. The sampling method used was a convenience sample. A total of 100 responses were collected from the survey. All the responses were analyzed through SPSS software (IBM version 23.0). Descriptive statistical analysis was used for the distribution and frequency.

## RESULTS

A total of 100 dentists participated in the study in which 70 were males and 30 were females. 59% of males and 25% females felt that undergraduate dental curriculum must include practice management while 14% males and 2% females said that practice management need not be encompassed in the curriculum [Figure 1]. 71% of Pedodontist and 27% Orthodontists agree that management skills must be included in the curriculum whereas 2% Pedodontist disagree with this [Figure 2]. The study found that 44% of males and 17% of females agrees to



**Figure 1:** Association between gender and the response to the inclusion of practice management course in the undergraduate dental program,  $P = 0.582$

educate dental students on principles of marketing to set up a dental clinic while 6% male and females opposes this, 22% male and 4% fe-males strongly disagree and 1% male strongly agrees [Figure 3]. Also, 36% males and 16% females have attended practice management courses in their undergraduate program whilst 37% males and 11% females have not attended the practice management course in their undergaduation [Figure 4].

## DISCUSSION

59% of males and 25% of females felt that undergraduate dental curriculum must include practice management, while 14% of males and 2% of females said that practice management needs not be encompassed in the curriculum [Figure 1]. Surprisingly, a previous study shows results in which female dentists agreed to the topic more than the male dentists.<sup>[34]</sup> Previous studies suggest that practice management is essential for a promising dental practice.<sup>[35]</sup>

71% of pedodontists and 27% of orthodontists agree that management skills must be included in the curriculum whereas 2% of pedodontists disagree with this [Figure 2]. The clove of a dentist depends on the efficient care of patients in his/her practice which will lead to patient satisfaction.<sup>[36]</sup> Previous study suggests that scheduled appointments and efficient management of time go hand in hand in case of private practice and yield good clinical outcomes.<sup>[37]</sup> Management of time involves division of labor and assigning work to each member of the dental team so that time can be allocated by the dentist, which can improve the patient care.<sup>[38]</sup>

The study found that 44% of males and 17% of females agrees to educate dental students on principles of marketing to set up a dental clinic while 6% male and females opposes this, 22% male and 4% females strongly disagree and 1% male

strongly agrees [Figure 3]. Investing into clinics to make it attractive yields increased patient flow and profitability to the practitioner.<sup>[39]</sup>

This study also found that 36% of males and 16% of females have attended practice management courses in their undergraduate program while 37% of males and 11% of females have not attended the practice management course in their undergraduation [Figure 4]. Dentists attending practice management courses can spread knowledge and importance of the course in different aspects of dental practice.<sup>[13]</sup> It was found that realization regarding the topic will be attained only during the course and up-to-date knowledge for the continued success of a private practice.<sup>[40]</sup> The opinion of dentists running a private practice is very essential to be taken into consideration as it is extremely valuable when put into effect a course that helps in dental practice for a future dentist.<sup>[41]</sup>

71% of males and 27% of females agree and 2% of males disagree that dental students should know about the regulatory requirements to set up a clinic. Dentists with a minimum experience of <3 years showed varying results,

out of which 28% of them disagree and 20% of them agree that dental students should know about the regulatory requirements to set up a clinic whereas dentists with an experience of more than 3 years tell that 27% of dentists disagree and 25% agree [Figure 5]. Anyway, a large population of dentists still stresses on the importance of practice management and entail the subject matter of all topics in the course so that the students could be benefited out of it.<sup>[42]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that dentists stressed on the need and importance of practice management courses in the undergraduate dental program. Majority (61%) agree that undergraduate dental curriculum must encompass practice management, and also, 52% of the dentists who have dealt with the course feel that it should be taught to budding dentists so that they might find it easier to deal with patients and improve the patient satisfaction and outcome of the procedure in future during their private practice. There is statistically significant male predominance of about 31% ( $P = 0.582$ ). The pattern followed in different

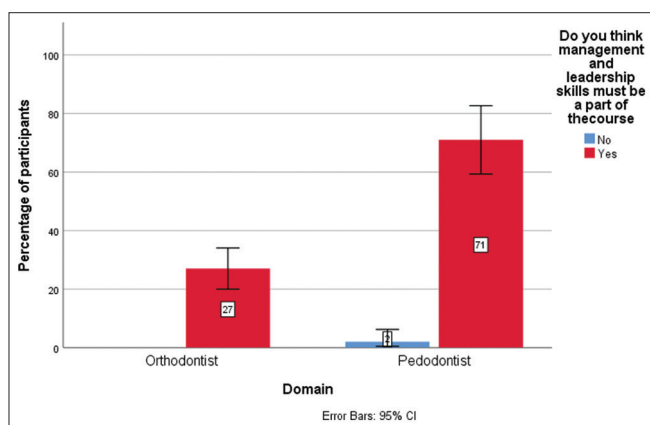


Figure 2: Association between gender and the response to the opinion on inclusion of management and leadership to be a part of the course

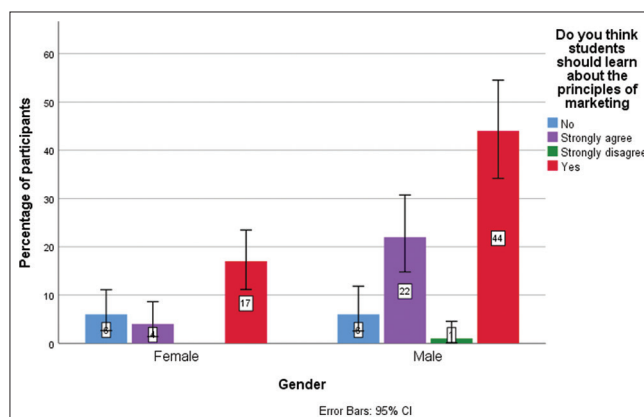


Figure 3: Association between gender and the response to the principles of marketing among undergraduate dental students

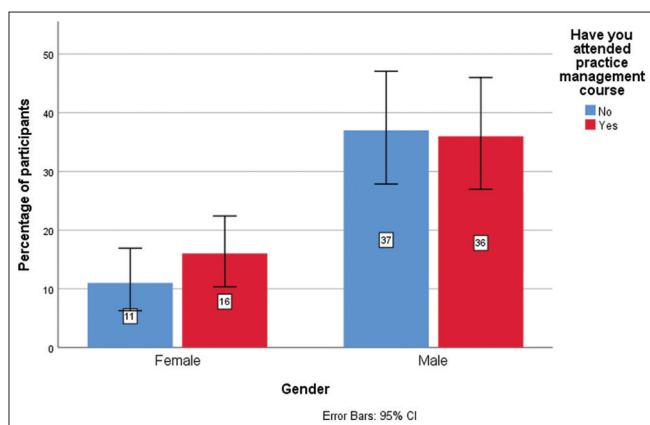


Figure 4: Association between gender and the response on attendance of practice management course in undergraduate dental program

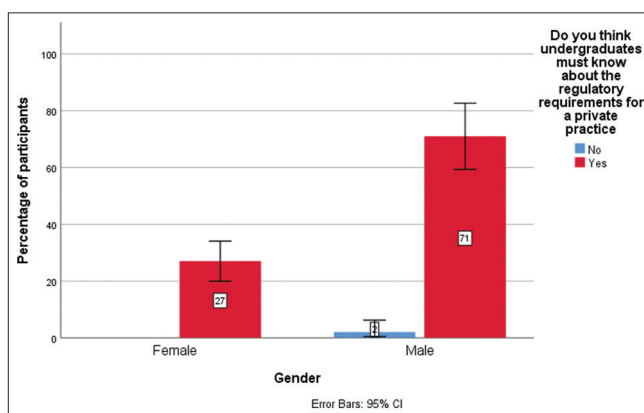


Figure 5: Association between gender and the response on regulatory requirements for a private practice in undergraduate dental program

countries for practice management can be taken into consideration in the framework of syllabus in India so that all topics are covered and the students can learn on various aspects and challenges put forth to them by the patients in future.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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