



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The state of Oral Medicine and Oral Pathology in the Arab Middle East



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Abstract The Arab World consists of 22 countries with more than half located in the Arab Middle East. Whereas the current state of Oral Medicine and Oral Pathology in the Western World is well known, available information on the current state of Oral Medicine and Oral Pathology across the Arab Middle East is lacking. This concise communication sheds light on the current state of these two specialties with specific reference to specialty training programs, board certification, and future directions. This piece provides valuable information to the general public and other disciplines to raise awareness and guide clinicians in making appropriate referrals. Additionally, it is of importance to newly graduated dentists interested in pursuing a career in either of these two disciplines. © 2019 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of King Saud University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

With the increase in health expenses and the cost of health insurance in many Western countries, and the long wait times to see specialists in countries in which public healthcare is free, the Arab Middle East has become an increasingly popular destination for medical and dental tourism. The Arab Middle East includes 13 countries, namely: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

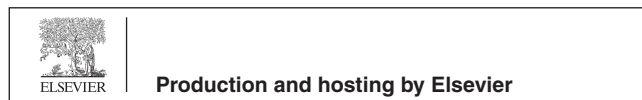
Oral Medicine (OM) and Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology (referred to in this communication as Oral Pathology (OP)) are closely related areas of specialization and are considered vital to a comprehensive healthcare system. The National Commission on Recognition of Dental Specialties and Certifying Boards of the United States defines OP as the dental specialty “that deals with the nature, identification, and management of diseases affecting the oral and maxillofacial regions”. OM is defined by the American Academy of Oral Medicine (AAOM) as the “discipline of dentistry concerned with the oral health care of medically complex patients- including the diagnosis and management of medical conditions that affect the oral and maxillofacial region.”

As healthcare costs are continuously on the rise in Western countries, especially in the United States, medical and dental tourism is consequently destined to rise. There unfortunately is a significant gap in the Arab healthcare system in both the number of OM and OP specialists, educators, and training programs and overall awareness of these specialties

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(Alrashdan et al., 2019). A reliable method to locate OM or OP specialists in the Arab Middle East is through online directories provided by the AAOM or the American Academy of Oral & Maxillofacial Pathology (AAOMP). Another reliable source is through the International Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathologists' (IAOP) website, where an appointed regional area councilor can be contacted for a desired region. These search engines provide important information for patients and for referring or consulting practitioners, especially if a patient's permanent residence is in the Arab Middle East. The AAOM and the AAOMP search engines (Table 1) identify a limited number of specialists in a small number of Arab Middle Eastern countries and this highlights the need for other associations within the Arab Middle East to provide similar directories. The lack of this information is likely to restrict patients' access to qualified healthcare practitioners in these disciplines in the Arab Middle East and may lead to diagnostic delays.

The presence of very few numbers of established OM or OP training programs, the lack of information available on these specialty training programs, and the lack of guidance provided on career opportunities in these specialties are attributes that affect recent dental graduates' desire of pursuing a career in OM and/or OP. This was highlighted by Alrashdan et al. (2018), who indicated a general lack of interest in OM and/or OP postgraduate training among senior dental students from a single Middle Eastern institution (Alrashdan et al., 2018). Using the common online search engine *Google*, limited information about the status of these two specialties was identified. The obtained results are summarized in Table 2.

According to the Arab Board of Health Specialization (ABHS), neither OM nor OP are listed as specialties. The lack of specialty recognition by the ABHS, which is universally recognized by the Arab World, might be one reason for the lack of awareness of these specialties among the Arab Middle East. The ABHS only recognizes one dental specialty, which is Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS). It is important to note, that the reason that OMFS is the only recognized dental specialty by the ABHS is likely due to the lack of awareness of

Table 1 The number of Oral Medicine & Pathology specialists in Arab Middle Eastern countries according to the AAOM & AAOMP directories.

Country	Oral Medicine	Oral Pathology	Oral Medicine & Pathology
Bahrain	n/a	n/a	n/a
Egypt	n/a	n/a	n/a
Iraq	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jordan	1	n/a	n/a
Kuwait	1	3	n/a
Lebanon	n/a	n/a	n/a
Oman	n/a	n/a	n/a
Palestine	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	n/a	n/a	n/a
Saudi Arabia	9	6	3
Syria	n/a	n/a	n/a
United Arab Emirates	n/a	n/a	n/a
Yemen	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a indicates not available or not accessible.

Table 2 Specialty recognition, services, and training of Oral Medicine (OM) and/or Oral Pathology (OP) in Arab Middle Eastern Countries.

Country	Recognized Specialty*	Specialty Trained Practitioner(s)/Service (s)	Training Program (s)
Bahrain	OM	OM & OP	n/a
Egypt	n/a	OM & OP	OM & OP
Iraq	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jordan	OM	OM & OP	OM
Kuwait	n/a	OM	n/a
Lebanon	n/a	OM	OM
Oman	n/a	OM & OP	n/a
Palestine	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	OM	OM	n/a
Saudi Arabia	OM & OP	OM & OP	OM & OP
Syria	n/a	n/a	n/a
United Arab Emirates	n/a	OM & OP	n/a
Yemen	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a indicates not available or not accessible.

* A dental specialty that is deemed eligible for licensure by the country's health council.

the need of OM and OP services. Moreover, despite an increasing demand for OP specialists, a recent study concluded that there is a low utilization of OP services in Saudi Arabia, even when general pathologists were aware of oral pathologists and the specialty (Binmadi and Almazrooa, 2017).

One limitation of this communication piece is that information was only obtained from available online sources in the English language. No personal communication or translations of Arabic websites were conducted and therefore, the information contained in this piece is reflective of what is available in the public domain. This highlights the need for regional associations and affiliated dental schools to make information on specialty programs and services more readily available.

In conclusion, there is a crucial need for an online platform through which patients and health practitioners can easily navigate to identify OM and/or OP specialists. This is more so of importance in such a highly demanded region for medical and dental tourism. Also, the provision of clear online databases on the availability of OM and/or OP specialty training programs and their accreditation status is of a great value for recent dental graduates and foreign-trained practitioners who are seeking a career in the Arab Middle East. More emphasis in dental schools should be given to graduating dental students on the potential career opportunities in OM and OP.

Ethical statement

N/A: non-applicable.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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