



Policy Statement

Mental health and well-being for oral health professionals and dental students

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FDI World Dental Federation

KEYWORDS:

burnout syndrome
dental team
dentists
general health
health promotion
mental health
national health policies
practitioners
prevention
resilience
workforce

DEFINITIONS

Mental health: A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.

Determinants of mental health: Throughout life, multiple individual, social and structural determinants may combine to protect or undermine one's mental health. Individual psychological and biological factors such as emotional skills, substance use and genetics can make one more vulnerable to mental health problems. Exposure to unfavourable social, economic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances can also increase the risk of experiencing mental health conditions.

Burnout: A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- Feelings of energy depletion and/or exhaustion;
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to life activities; and
- Reduction of personal and professional efficacy.

Burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context.

PRINCIPLES

Mental health is an important aspect of the overall well-being of oral health professionals and dental students. Oral health professionals also have an ethical and legal obligation to be fit to practise that includes mental health.

Protecting the mental health of oral health professionals and dental students in a preventive approach in the workplace context should be of high importance for all involved. Support and well-being services should be easily accessible and affordable.

POLICY

FDI emphasizes the importance of good mental health for oral health professionals and dental students. Only this way

CONTEXT

Many international and national studies have shown that dentists are among those healthcare providers particularly prone to burnout syndrome and mental health problems in their daily work. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this worrying trend. If left untreated or unrecognized by those affected, this condition, which is associated with states of exhaustion of varying severity, can lead to chronic depression and even suicidal thoughts.

Irrespective of a possible genetic predisposition of the individual, various stressors in the dental profession can lead to a burnout syndrome of the practitioner and the dental team. Studies in recent years have also been able to prove that stress, especially psychosocial stress, depression, burnout syndrome, anxiety and depersonalization are already of concern when studying dentistry. Psychosocial stress affects the individual health of dental students, dentists and the dental team alike.

SCOPE

This policy statement is aimed at relevant national authorities, universities, national dental associations, national dental students' associations and oral health professionals as well as their dental teams to raise awareness on mental health in the dental community.

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oral health professionals are able to serve the community and provide good oral health care to those in need. The stigma of mental illnesses should be ended and it should also be normalized to talk about in a workplace context.

FDI encourages National Dental Associations, in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders, to:

- raise awareness constantly and recurrently on the importance of mental health of oral health professionals and dental students;
- create support resources and make help easily available for oral health professionals and students struggling with mental health (through virtual counselling, helplines, well-being support, community forums);
- have a proactive approach to enabling a discussion about mental health with the dental team through various platforms (online, social media, print media);
- offer recurrent training, seminars, dental congresses and webinars for all members of the dental team on mental health, to care for their own mental health and to know how to help colleagues in need.

FDI encourages dental educational institutions to:

- create support resources (e.g., online counselling, helplines) for dental students struggling with mental health, and make these easily accessible and anonymous;
- provide students with the required knowledge and skills for protecting their mental health during their studies and in their future working environment.

FDI encourages research institutions to advance research on burnout syndrome and mental health in connection with working as an oral health professional.

DISCLAIMER

The information in this Policy Statement was based on the best scientific evidence available at the time. It may be interpreted to reflect prevailing cultural sensitivities and socio-economic constraints.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None

FURTHER READING

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