

# How Practice Ready are We? Attitude among Fresh Dental Graduates Regarding Dental Practice Management in India

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## Abstract:-

### ➤ Background

Dental practice management encompasses the administrative and operational aspects of running a dental office efficiently. Fostering dental practice management skills which are tailored to the current social needs will aid the practitioner to be more competent and successful.

### ➤ Aim

The aim of this study is to assess the attitude among fresh dental graduates regarding dental practice management.

### ➤ Materials and Methods

This survey was conducted among 207 interns, fresh dental graduates, and postgraduate students of various dental specialties. The study tool was a questionnaire, consisting of basic demographics and 11 questions, to assess participant's attitude on dental practice management. Data collection was done using Google forms circulating through social media platforms and the first 207 to submit fully answered questionnaire were included in the study. The data was then statistically analyzed.

### ➤ Conclusion

Mean age of the study population was  $26 \pm 2.58$ . Majority of the study population (80.7%) felt that dental practice management was equally important as clinical skill for a successful dental practice and thought it would be helpful if there were guidelines for dental practice management in India. Our study findings indicate need for reforms in dental curriculum and training in this area.

**Keywords:-** Dental Practice Management, Communication Skills, Social Media Marketing, Financial Management.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dentistry is considered an amalgamation of art and science which also includes the dentists skill set, practical knowledge and also how to incorporate an evidence based dental practice<sup>1</sup>. For dentist to effectively serve the community as healthcare professionals in our highly commercial society, they need to be proficient not only in their clinical skills but also in non-clinical aspects of dental practice to be a successful dental practitioner.<sup>2</sup> However, they are trained with a singular focus on clinical excellence, without much training on practice marketing, selling services, or exploring business models and profitability, as these topics are typically not included in their education.<sup>3</sup>

It is very important to train and teach dental students on communication skills, management of staff and patients, teamwork, conflict management, and economy management, as well as all the other skills needed for a successful career through a practice management course.<sup>4</sup> To be a successful practitioner it's important that dental students are prepared to adapt to the needs of the society in order to be competent in the practice management while also providing a holistic patient care.<sup>5</sup> Like any other profession in the world, planning and managing a dental practice has its own challenges as it requires a high level of commitment, business acumen, marketing knowledge, industry awareness and above all awareness on various aspects of the practice.

There are reports in the scientific literature regarding the hurdles faced by dentists at the beginning of their career for instance in a study which was conducted in University of Michigan School of Dentistry majority of them felt that they lacked practice management skills and believed there was a need to improve the curriculum focused on these aspects of dental practice.<sup>6</sup> In another study conducted on French students found difficulty in time management administrative matters and clinical decision-making<sup>7</sup> Likewise, In Mexico private practitioners faced problems not only in management of economical and legal matters but also the occupational health problems.<sup>8</sup>

In UK young dental practitioners felt the need to emphasize teaching of certain non-clinical subjects such as business and communication skills.<sup>4</sup> Practitioners in Malaysia felt the need to enhance skills on practice management among dental students and In Iran, Dentists faced difficulties while managing a dental practice and suggested that practice management courses and its training could be beneficial in their careers.<sup>4</sup> In countries like U.S., UK, and Australia dental schools are increasingly incorporating practice management into their curriculum with students receiving some training in practice management as part of their undergraduate programs and have also developed practice management guidelines.<sup>(8,10,11)</sup>

Currently in India, the curriculum put forth by the national council of dental studies does not include dental practice management, it is solely focused on clinical skills, but there is a growing recognition of the need for practice management training of the dental students. However institutions have started providing practice management training in the forms of workshops. Scientific literature regarding its status in India is lacking. Available reports have suggested majority of the study participants felt the need to incorporate dental practice management as a part of their curriculum<sup>12</sup>. India boasts the second highest number of dentists globally, supplying approximately 15000 fresh dentists every year.<sup>12</sup> hence this study was conducted to assess the attitude among fresh dental graduates regarding dental practice management in the undergraduate curriculum and its importance.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample size estimation was done based on a study conducted by Aathira C M et al.<sup>4</sup> It was based on the responses to include the practice management course in the undergraduate dental program and was estimated to be 207. After receiving ethical approval from the institutional ethics committee, the questionnaire survey was conducted among interns, fresh dental graduates, and postgraduate students of various dental specialties.

The study tool used was a questionnaire, created by a team two professors and a postgraduate in department of pediatric and preventive dentistry by reviewing the relevant scientific literature, which was further tested for validity and reliability. Questionnaire consisted of two parts, in which first part was on basic demographics and the second part consisted of 11 questions related to participant's attitude on dental practice management. Study participants with an experience of  $\leq 3$  years were included in the study. The data was collected using Google forms and it was sent through social media platforms like whatsapp and instagram over a period of a month and study participants were reminded to fill the questionnaire once a week the first 207 to give consent and submitted their duly filled forms were a part of the study. The data was then statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## III. RESULTS

The study population aged between 22 years to 30years and the mean age was  $26 \pm 2.58$  and consisted of consisted of 137 (66.18%) of females and 70 (33.81%) males. Professional details and the different Specialties has been given in graph 1 and 2 respectively. Majority of the study population 167(80.7%) felt that dental practice management was equally important as clinical skill for a successful dental practice. 84.1% of the study population felt excellent dental knowledge, effective communication, financial management skills and social media and marketing skills are important for a successful dental practice. 40.9% study population (n=85), responded that moderate emphasis was placed on dental practice management in their under-graduation training, 92.7% (N=191) responded that effective communication skills will aid in better patient retention and compliance. Responses to few questions have been displayed in table 1.

## IV. DISCUSSION

Dental practice management encompasses a wide range of activities and responsibilities designed to ensure the smooth operation of a dental practice. It involves managing the business side of dentistry, which is crucial for providing quality patient care while maintaining profitability. It is an emerging area, and literature available pertaining to this topic is mostly from western or European countries which might not be suitable to implement in an Indian scenario. In our study we have attempted to shed light on this topic and have found responses from various fresh dental graduates across India which is a novelty of our study.

Dental practice management was considered equally important to clinical skills for successful practice among 80.7% (167) of the study participant in our study, which is not in agreement with the study conducted by Priyaa et al.<sup>13</sup> Majority of our study participants(84%) agreed that along with excellent knowledge, various skill sets such as effective communication, financial skills, social media marketing skills are essential for a successful practice which was in agreement with a few studies.<sup>(4,13,14)</sup>

In our study the participants (92.7%) responded effective communication is very important for better patient retention, this was in agreement to a study conducted by Sunila B. Sangappa et al<sup>14</sup> who conducted a study on dental undergraduate students and concluded that implementing a course on communication skills would be to be very effective in dentist-patient interactions. The medical council of India has already incorporated the Attitude, ethics and communication(AETCOM) course as part of the competency based undergraduate curriculum for medical education in India and is focusing on developing professionalism, communication skills, and ethical values<sup>15</sup>. Communication courses like these should be a integral part of the dental undergraduate curriculum to help

students communicate better and build confidence to understand and treat their patients in a more humane manner.

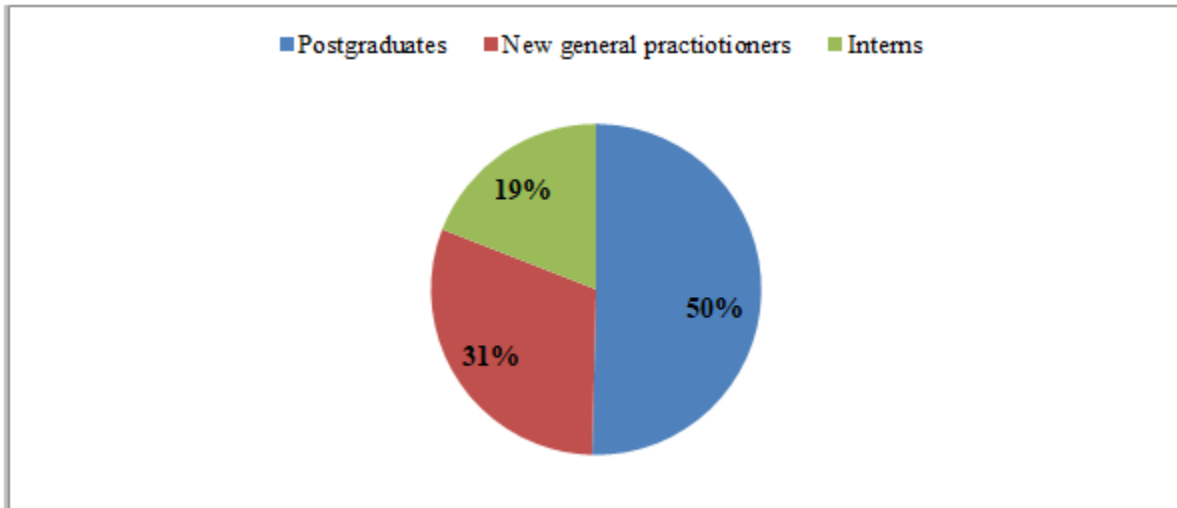
Majority of the study population were interested to attend workshops regarding dental practice management and felt that there is a need for guidelines in dental practice management in India. Reforms in the dental curriculum through incorporation of dental practice management would be pivotal. This study would provide the base line data for the advocacy of new framework by the policymakers to incorporate this essential skill set in the dental curriculum. Further studies larger-cohorts are recommended.

## V. CONCLUSION

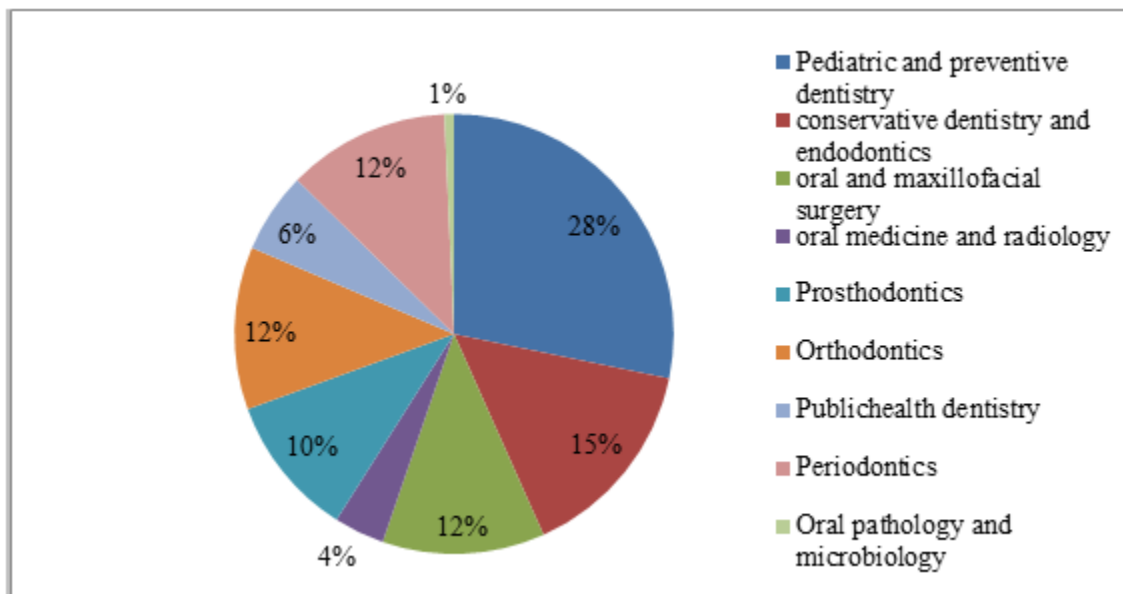
Dental practice management is an important aspect for success of the dental practice especially in the current technologically advanced and fast paces society. There is a need for reforms in the curriculum and training; also need for guidelines in dental practice management for enablement of the dental practitioner.

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**Graph-1: Representation of Professional Details**



**Graph-2 : Representation of Different Dental Specialties**

**Table -1: Responses to Few Questions on Attitudes Regarding Dental Practice Management**  
**NA\*- Not applicable**

SL. No	Question	Yes	No	Maybe	Not sure
1.	Do you think you have the knowledge and the required skills to plan and build a dental practice?	117 (56.5%)	15 (7.2%)	NA*	75 (36.2%)
2.	Do you think it's necessary to learn the skills to manage and monitor dental practice finances, including budgeting, expenses, and revenue tracking/investing?	157 (75.8%)	5 (2.4%)	33 (15.9%)	12 (5.8%)
3.	Do you think having of marketing and advertising skills can be beneficial to aid in greater revenue/footfall in your dental practice?	160 (76.9%)	7 (3.4%)	34 (16.3%)	6 (2.89%)
4.	Do you currently market/ advertise your clinical skills and promotion of dental health on social media?	110 (53.14%)	97 (46.8%)	NA*	NA*
5.	Have you attended any continuing education courses or workshops specifically focused on dental practice management?	92 (44.4%)	115 (55.8%)	NA*	NA*
6.	Would you like to attend workshops on dental practice management if conducted?	168 (81.2%)	3 (1.4%)	34 (16.4%)	2 (1%)
7.	Would it be helpful if there was a guideline for dental practice management in India?	180 (87%)	4 (1.9%)	21 (10.1%)	2 (1%)