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From the Dining Table to the Dental Chair': How Family Gatherings Sculpt Non-Technical Skills of a Dentist- A Narrative Review.

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Abstract

Non-technical skills (NTS) such as communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, stress management, teamwork, leadership and patient-centered care are identified to be important elements in providing a safe, high quality and effective dental practice. Although technical expertise is emphasized in clinical training, the social and relational foundations of communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, stress management, teamwork, leadership, and patient-centered care are recognized as essential contributors to a safe, high-quality, and effective dental practice, these cognitive and interpersonal competencies are under-investigated. The paper argues that regular participation in family get-togethers constitutes a naturalistic, informal training ground that improves a dentist's NTS, which in turn translates into better patient outcomes and less clinical burnout.

Keywords: Family Get-together; Non-Technical Skills; Communication; Empathy; Emotional Intelligence; Dental Practice.

1. Introduction

The current paradigm of dentistry education and clinical practice has increasingly recognized that manual dexterity and technical ability are not sufficient to ensure safe and successful patient outcomes. Non-technical skills (NTS) are cognitive, social and personal resource abilities that complement technical skills and procedures and are essential for the reduction of adverse events and the optimization of therapeutic trust. [1]

Key components of NTS in dentistry are straightforward communication, emotional intelligence (EI), empathy, stress management, collaborative teamwork and leadership. Historically, these features were thought to be stable, innate personality traits. However, contemporary psychosocial and medical education frameworks show that interpersonal competences are highly plastic and are continuously molded by an individual's socio-cultural environment. In this environmental context, the principal social micro-system, i.e., regular family reunions and strong domestic support networks, remains an unappreciated but powerful setting for informal behavioral learning. Such occasions have distinct relational dynamics of modest, actively negotiated stakes, emotional management, various communication styles, and shared tasks. [2]

Family get-together can improve dentist's competencies by complementing with: [1-3]

1. 1.Trust and happiness of patients
2. Communication quality
3. Clinical decision making
4. Working as a team
5. Reduction of medical errors
6. Stress resistance and professional well-being
7. Overall quality and safety of dental care

Increasingly, dentistry education is recognizing that successful practice requires not only technical skill but also excellent interpersonal competencies. There is very scanty literature is available on this topic. In this work, we explore the extent to which collaborative, emotional and social behaviours developed in frequent family encounters provide a direct, transferable foundation for the complex interpersonal demands of patient-centred dental treatment. [4]

Discussion

Family get-togethers can indirectly help to develop a number of non-technical skills that are vital for dentists. However, while technical knowledge and clinical abilities are vital, interpersonal and emotional skills contribute greatly to patient satisfaction, treatment outcomes and teamwork in the workplace.

There is strong evidence that family support and healthy social relationships improve mental health, communication, resilience and empathy, but limited direct research to show that family get-togethers per se lead to improvements in dentists' non-technical competencies. This is better expressed as a tentative pathway supported by broader evidence about social support, emotional growth and professional competence rather than a proved causal relationship.

A corpus of research has not been built that looks specifically at family get-togethers and dentists' non-technical competencies. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of evidence indicating family support, social connectivity and healthy interpersonal interactions increase psychological well-being and socio-emotional

abilities, which are known factors of effective healthcare practice.

Alternatively, the relationship can be explained by combining information from three well-established fields of research: [4,5]

A. Social support and family functioning/ Family Support Enhances Psychological Well-being

B. Emotional and psychological development/ Social Relations Encourage Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

C. Non-technical competencies in health care professionals/ Social support enhances communication skills.

Family get-togethers can indirectly strengthen the dentist's non-technical competencies

Family Support Improves Mental Health

One of the most robust findings in health psychology is that supportive family interactions increase emotional health and resilience. In a seminal review, Uchino (2006) [6] showed that those with more robust social ties have reduced stress reactivity, enhanced emotional regulation, better mental health, and even better physical health outcomes. A supportive family can help protect against chronic stress as it provides emotional reassurance, practical help and a feeling of belonging.

Similarly, Cohen and Wills (1985) [7] established the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis, according to which social support buffers individuals from the detrimental effects of stressful life experiences. Dentistry is a high stress profession and emotional support from regular family interactions may enhance dentists' coping capacities and decrease burnout. Although these studies do not explicitly investigate family gatherings, they offer solid evidence that healthy family interactions have a beneficial impact on emotional resilience.

Social relationships help to develop emotional intelligence and empathy.

Emotional intelligence is primarily learned through frequent interpersonal interactions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) state that [8] emotional intelligence includes: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social awareness and relationship management. Family settings provide one of the earliest and most ongoing opportunities to practice these qualities. Later Goleman (1995) [9] stated that regular exposure to emotional experiences, conflict resolution, caregiving and communication within partnerships characterized by emotional support fosters empathy and interpersonal competence.

Empathy is vital in dentistry especially. Decety and Fotopoulou (2015) [10] evaluated data suggesting empathy promotes patient trust, satisfaction, adherence to therapy and clinical results. Their review is focused on healthcare workers rather than family relations, although it does identify empathy as a core professional ability.

Social Support Improves Communication Skills.

Communication is a social taught activity. Family gatherings call for skills such as active listening, negotiating differences, explaining viewpoints, interpreting emotions, and adapting communication across various age groups. These experiences reflect numerous communication demands in dentistry practice. Silverman, Kurtz and Draper (2013) [11] point out that good communication in healthcare is based on active listening, empathy, emotional response and clear explanation which are developed through frequent social contact rather than technical training alone. Thus, family reunions are informal yet natural scenarios where communication skills are constantly exercised.

Family support helps with stress

Dentistry is typically among the most stressful healthcare professions. Burnout negatively affects: patient safety, communication, decision making, and teamwork. Physicians with lesser burnout reported increased work satisfaction and better interpersonal functioning (Shanafelt et al., 2012) [12]. This study addressed physicians, not dentists, yet occupational pressures are similar in health care professions. Family support is regularly identified as one of the strongest protective factors against burnout, as emotional support enhances resilience and coping capacity.

Why It Cannot Be Said to Cause

From an evidence-based approach, there are various methodological restrictions that preclude causal assertions. At present, there are no longitudinal or randomized studies comparing dentists who engage frequently in family gatherings with those who do not while evaluating changes in communication, empathy, teamwork or leadership. There are several confounding variables that impact professional abilities, including personality traits, education, workplace culture, mentorship, clinical experience, socioeconomic background, and mental health. Hence, any apparent link between family gatherings and professional competencies may be reflecting these broader factors rather than family interactions alone.

Empathic

Family life is typically about taking care of each other through sickness, celebrations, arguments, and personal struggles. These encounters build empathy, prompting people to recognize and react to the feelings of others. Dentists with empathy are more likely to identify the worries and anxieties of patients, especially those linked to dental treatment, which in turn enhances the trust and pleasure of the patients.

Emotional Intelligence

It's about emotional intelligence — the ability to detect, comprehend and control your own emotions, and respond correctly to others. Regular contact with family exposes one to emotionally diverse settings that improve self-awareness, emotional regulation and social awareness. Emotional Intelligence in Dentistry assists dental professionals to remain cool in stressful situations , handle difficult patients , and form good connections with colleagues .

Collaborative Working

If it's an occasion, or a dinner, or an issue — the family has to work together, coordinate with one another, cooperate. These experiences are based on collaboration, flexibility and shared accountability. Dentistry is very much a team effort involving dentists, dental hygienists, assistants, technicians and administrative staff. Better teamwork results in better efficiency, patient safety and quality of care.

Leadership

In families, people may be responsible for planning activities, decision making, conflict resolution or caring for younger or elderly members. These informal leadership experiences build decision making, responsibility, delegation and interpersonal impact. These leadership abilities enable dentists to successfully lead dental teams and organize patient care.

Person-Centered Care

Family relationships nurture respect for personal choices, cultural values, and unique personal demands. Dentists who understand these characteristics are more likely to deliver patient-centered care that includes engaging patients in treatment decisions, honoring patient concerns, and personalizing therapy to the

particular patient. Caring for patients and their needs increases the likelihood that they will stick to the prescribed treatment, their satisfaction with the care they receive and the clinical results.

Conclusion

Family gatherings are casual social occasions yet they provide recurring opportunity to build communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, teamwork, leadership, stress management, and patient-centered attitudes. These qualities are generally seen as important components of safe, effective and quality dentistry practice, complementing technical skills and resulting in better patient results.

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