

Attitudes of Dental and Dental Hygiene Seniors Towards Mental Health Screening in the Dental Setting

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Problem

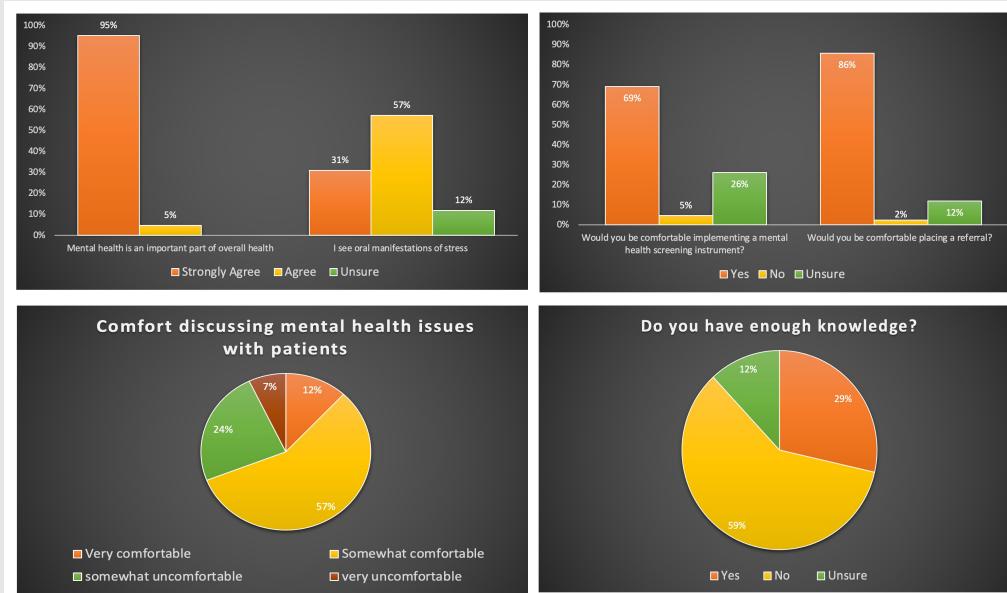
- Nearly 1 in 5 adults in the US live with mental illness, however less than half have received treatment.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the prevalence and severity of mental illness.
- 64.9% of US adults see their dentist regularly, and there is a shortage of physicians, putting dental clinicians in a unique position to screen and refer patients for mental health treatment.

Objectives

The purpose of this pilot research is to identify the current attitudes about mental health screenings in dental settings among senior dental and dental hygiene students.

Methods

- A 10-question survey was developed and distributed using Qualtrics, a UMB affiliated program via email. Participation was voluntary.
- A convenience sample was used of senior dental and dental hygiene students with a 29% response rate.
- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data.
- The University of Maryland, Baltimore's Institutional Review Board determined this project (HP-00099607) did not meet the definition of human subject research.



Results

- About 60% of students feel they do not have enough background on mental health in their curriculum
- 69% of students would be willing to implement mental health screening in their clinic
- 86% of students felt comfortable referring patients to outside resources for their mental health
- 62% of students thought the best time to use a mental health screener is during medical history
- 62% of students would prefer to administer a mental health screener in writing as opposed to verbally

Concerns with implementing a mental health screening tool in clinic include: "offending the patient", not "knowing the necessary steps to get the patient to the right place if they need help", and necessity "to build rapport first."

Conclusion

- Students felt comfortable implementing mental health screenings and initiating referrals; yet they believed that more emphasis should be placed on mental health concepts in the curriculum
- Limitations:** the results are school-specific and cannot be generalized
- Future research:** student attitudes should be assessed nationwide

References

Czeisler MÉ , Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1049–1057.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>