



ASSESSMENT OF PATIENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROFESSIONALISM

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Article Received on 14/10/2019

Article Revised on 04/11/2019

Article Accepted on 25/11/2019

ABSTRACT

Professionalism is the complex that is associated with multiple factors including patients age, gender, education, qualification and economic status. The aim of the study was to assess patients' perceptions of professionalism practiced by dental students during their clinicals. The doctor and the patient relationship and communication has been influenced by the appearance of the doctors. The study aims to assess the attitude and perceptions of the dental patients towards professionalism.

KEYWORDS: Dental patients, Professionalism, Dental students, Attire, Attitude, Behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism is an essential attribute of dentists who provide high-quality patient care. Professionalism is concerned with the norms, values and behavior of dentists as they carry out their daily work.^{[1][2]} Over the last 25 years, emphasis on professionalism has made it an increasingly important aspect of medical and dental practice. This is thought to be the result of broad societal changes that include media attention to health care, especially with respect to high profile cases, the increased availability of information via the internet, changes in the philosophy of patient care, especially with respect to teamwork and changes to regulatory bodies brought about by governmental pressures.^{[3][4][5]} In turn, the emphasis in dental education has increased so that professionalism is now a central part of both undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum.^{[3][7]} Professionalism can be viewed as a sociological construct because high status is granted by society to professionals in return for their skills in the service of society.^[4] Over the last 25 years, there has also been an increase in public expectations of the quality of patient care and service delivery. Professional standards are increasingly being questioned. Within medicine, this led to a number of working parties, reports and recommendations for change.^[8] The recommended changes, whilst based on traditional values of vocation, integrity, honesty and altruism, ensured more transparency, more patient involvement, an increased emphasis on reflection and an increased role for the

teaching and assessment of professionalism within medical education.^{[5][9]}

Professionalism in health care is defined as "the standard to which a patient can ensure expect from their health care provider. Professionalism is also a complex overlap between a behaviour, skill, communication and external appearance. Professionalism also entitles the application of scientific knowledge to clinical skill, communication skills between patient and the dentist. Professionalism is defined as "a function of clinical skill, engagement and competence and an image, which promotes a successful relationship with patients. Professionalism also describes the dress code which distinguish the dentist from other professionals. The formal attire and communication skills forms a successful non-verbal influence among the patients. The dental professional attire changes with time, the white coat has been accepted as a symbol of cleanliness.^[15]

The appearance of the dentist plays a key role in non-verbal communication and also affects the anxiety and confidence level of the patient. Certain appearance such as visible tattoos and multiple ear piercing may affect the patient perception towards dentists. The most widely accepted attire for dentists by patients is white lab coat and scrubs, surgical gowns, formals. A successful dental treatment requires complete interaction between the health care provider and the patients.^{[7][15]} A dentist with a welcoming behaviour, acceptable personality along with good rapport reassures the patient that he provides

an exceptional health care service. The age, gender, qualification, educational status of the dentist influences the professional attitude. The main responsibilities to be followed by the dentist are the interest of the patient should be considered first and should act to protect them, respect to patient's knowledge and options, being trust worthy. The effective time management, behaviour, attire portray professional integrity.^[14]

Psychologists have stated that the physical appearance and the attitude and its effects on the first impression and relationship between patient and the dentist. The jewellery, makeup, hairstyle, attire have little effect on patient's opinion on dental care providers.^[10] The most important quality of being a professional includes explanation of treatment to patient's time management during appointments punctuality, proper disposal of waste, proper sterilization of work space.^[11] This study was done to know about the patient's perception on dental professionalism and to know how the physical appearance, Attitude and behaviour of the dental students or dentist can influence their perception on them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire-based study was conducted in about 300 dental patients. The study was conducted with their complete concern and knowledge. In this study, there are 149 male patients and 151 female patients. The subjects were briefed about the study and informed consent obtained from them. The ethical committee approval was obtained from the university. All patients in the study completed a paper-based questionnaire consisting of 15 questions. First part of the questionnaire consists of

demographic details of subjects age, gender, occupation and qualification. The questions in the questionnaire were designed to access their knowledge towards professionalism. The information obtained during the data collection were kept confidential. The data were analysed using the software.

RESULTS

The survey was conducted among 300 patients. The questionnaire contains 15 questions. The demographics of the patients includes the age group from 18-70, 151 females, 149 males' patients from different socioeconomic status.

Among the survey population 55% of patients have strongly disagreed that casual clothes can be worn by dental students. And 57.3% of patients have strongly agreed to that formal clothes can be worn by dental students. And 50.7% of patients have strongly agreed to that dental student's appearance and behavior illustrates their professional integrity. And 52% of patients strongly agree to that dental students should use appropriate language and explain technical terms effectively. When it was asked, 83.3% of Males patients strongly disagreed that the dental students should wear white lab coat rather than the surgical gown or scrubs. About 74.5% of males had a neutral opinion that the dental students should use appropriate language and technical terms effectively. About 69% of females slightly disagree physical appearance and attitude of dental student is important to be professional. About 90% of the age group belonging to 36-70 years slightly disagree that formal can be worn by dental students.

Table 1: Distribution and comparison of study subjects' attitude towards professionalism according to their gender and age group.

S. NO	QUESTION	OPTION	N	%	MALES		FEMAL ES		P value	18-36 YEARS		36-70 YEARS		P value
					N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
1.	Do you think casual clothes can be worn by dental students?	Strongly Disagree	165	55.0	87	52.7	78	47.3	0.141	85	51.5	80	48.5	0.372
		Slightly Disagree	27	9.0	19	70.4	8	29.6		16	59.3	11	40.7	
		Neutral	35	11.7	20	57.1	15	42.9		17	48.6	18	51.4	
		Slightly Agree	17	5.7	12	70.6	5	29.4		5	29.4	12	70.6	
		Strongly Agree	56	18.7	38	67.9	18	32.1		26	46.4	30	53.6	
2.	Do you think formal clothes can be worn by dental students?	Strongly Disagree	21	7.0	14	66.7	7	33.3	0.289	7	33.3	14	66.7	0.049*
		Slightly Disagree	10	3.3	3	30.0	7	70.0		1	10	9	90.0	
		Neutral	48	16.0	28	58.3	20	41.7		25	42.1	23	27.9	
		Slightly Agree	49	16.3	26	53.1	23	46.9		27	55.1	22	44.9	
		Strongly Agree	172	57.3	105	61.0	67	39.0		89	51.7	83	48.3	
3.	Do you think dental students	Strongly Disagree	30	10.0	25	83.3	5	16.7	0.017*	14	46.7	16	53.3	0.397

	should wear a white lab coat rather than surgical gown or scrub?	Slightly Disagree	18	6.0	13	72.2	5	27.8	0.966	12	66.7	6	33.3	0.824
		Neutral	57	19.0	35	81.4	22	38.6		13	52.6	27	47.4	
		Slightly agree	69	23.0	35	50.7	34	49.3		29	42.0	40	58.0	
		Strongly agree	126	42.0	68	54.0	58	46.0		64	50.8	62	49.2	
4.	Do you think the student's facial hair/makeup affect your confidence on him/her?	Strongly disagree	43	14.3	24	55.8	19	44.2	0.966	21	48.8	22	51.2	0.824
		Slightly disagree	45	15.0	27	60.0	18	40.0		24	53.3	21	46.7	
		Neutral	121	40.0	69	57.5	51	42.5		56	46.7	64	53.3	
		Slightly agree	54	18.0	32	59.3	22	40.7		30	55.6	24	44.4	
		Strongly agree	38	12.7	2.4	63.2	14	36.8		18	47.4	20	52.6	
5.	Do you think the dental students appearance /attire change your confidence on him or her?	Strongly disagree	19	6.3	11	57.9	8	42.1	0.816	9	47.4	10	52.6	0.973
		Slightly disagree	33	11.0	18	54.5	15	45.5		18	54.5	15	45.5	
		Neutral	77	25.7	43	55.8	34	44.4		39	50.6	38	49.4	
		Slightly agree	63	21.0	41	65.1	22	34.9		30	47.6	33	52.4	
		Strongly agree	108	36.0	63	58.3	45	41.7		53	49.1	55	50.9	
6.	Do you think the dental student's appearance and behavior illustrates their professional integrity?	Strongly disagree	12	4.0	10	83.3	2	16.7	0.469	6	50.0	6	50.0	0.983
		Slightly disagree	14	4.7	7	50.0	7	50.0		7	50.0	7	50.0	
		Neutral	67	22.3	38	56.7	29	43.3		32	47.8	35	52.2	
		Slightly agree	55	18.3	32	58.2	23	41.8		26	47.3	29	52.7	
		Strongly agree	152	50.7	89	58.6	63	41.4		78	51.3	74	48.7	
7.	Do you think the dental student should maintain adequate infection control measures?	Strongly disagree	34	11.3	23	67.6	11	32.4	0.564	16	47.1	18	52.9	0.639
		Slightly disagree	12	4.0	7	58.3	5	41.7		6	50.0	6	50.0	
		Neutral	34	11.3	22	64.7	12	35.3		21	61.8	13	38/2	
		Slightly agree	91	30.3	48	52.7	43	47.3		42	46.2	49	53.8	
		Strongly agree	129	43.3	76	58.9	53	41.1		64	49.6	65	50.4	
8.	Do you think the dental student should display effective time management?	Strongly disagree	28	9.3	18	64.3	10	35.7	0.682	11	39.3	17	60.7	0.186
		Slightly disagree	18	6.0	8	44.4	10	55.6		5	27.8	13	72.2	
		Neutral	70	23.3	43	61.4	27	38.6		36	51.4	34	48.6	
		Slightly agree	63	21.0	38	60.3	25	39.7		36	57.1	37	42.9	
		Strongly agree	121	40.3	69	57.0	52	43.0		61	50.4	60	49.6	
9.	Do you think the dental student should use appropriate language and explain	Strongly disagree	8	2.7	4	50.0	4	50.0	0.024*	5	62.5	3	37.5	0.641
		Slightly disagree	8	2.7	5	62.5	3	37.5		2	25.0	6	75.0	
		Neutral	51	17.0	38	74.5	13	25.5		26	51.0	25	49.0	
		Slightly agree	77	25.7	35	45.5	42	54.5		38	49.4	39	50.6	

	technical terms effectively?	Strongly agree	126	52.0	94	60.3	62	39.7		78	50.0	78	50.0	
10.	Do you think the dental student should maintain neat working environment?	Strongly disagree	3	1.0	3	100	0	0	0.012*	0	0	3	100	0.118
		Slightly disagree	17	5.7	6	35.3	11	64.7		10	58.8	7	41.2	
		Neutral	62	20.7	30	48.4	32	51.6		24	38.7	38	61.3	
		Slightly agree	113	37.7	65	57.5	48	42.5		59	52.2	54	47.8	
		Strongly agree	105	35.0	72	68.6	33	31.4		56	53.3	49	46.7	
11.	Do you think the dental student's attitude can affect your confidence on him/her?	Strongly disagree	30	10.0	21	70.0	9	30.0	0.612	14	46.7	16	53.3	0.946
		Slightly disagree	12	4.0	7	58.3	5	41.7		5	41.7	7	58.3	
		Neutral	75	25.0	40	53.3	35	46.7		39	52	36	48	
		Slightly agree	116	38.7	67	57.8	49	42.2		59	50.9	57	49.1	
		Strongly agree	67	22.3	41	61.2	28	38.8		32	47.8	35	52.2	
12.	Do you think the dental students attitude greatly affects your comfort level?	Strongly disagree	5	1.7	4	80.0	1	20.0	0.570	4	80.0	1	20.0	0.373
		Slightly disagree	30	10.0	17	56.7	13	43.3		17	56.7	13	43.3	
		Neutral	103	34.3	55	53.4	48	46.6		53	51.5	50	48.7	
		Slightly agree	78	26.0	47	60.3	31	39.7		33	42.2	43	57.7	
		Strongly agree	84	28.0	53	63.1	31	36.9		42	50.0	42	50.0	
13.	Do you think the dental students attitude greatly affects your anxiety level?	Strongly disagree	17	5.7	9	52.9	8	47.1	0.493	7	41.2	10	58.8	0.747
		Slightly disagree	25	8.3	17	68.0	8	32.0		13	52.0	12	48.0	
		Neutral	83	37.7	48	57.8	35	42.2		39	47.0	44	53.0	
		Slightly agree	111	37.0	60	54.1	51	45.9		54	48.6	57	51.4	
		Strongly agree	64	21.3	42	65.6	22	34.4		36	56.3	28	43.8	
14.	Do you think the dental student should portray an equal level of professionalism in comparison with dental faculty or professors?	Strongly disagree	12	4.0	6	50.0	6	50.0	0.505	3	25.0	9	75.0	0.103
		Slightly disagree	46	15.3	24	52.2	22	47.8		17	37.0	29	63.0	
		Neutral	118	39.3	75	63.6	43	36.4		64	54.2	54	45.8	
		Slightly agree	76	25.3	41	53.9	35	46.1		38	50.0	38	50.0	
		Strongly agree	48	16.0	30	62.5	18	37.5		27	56.3	21	43.8	
15.	Do you believe the physical appearance and attitude of dental student is important to be professional?	Strongly disagree	41	13.7	23	56.1	18	43.9	0.026*	21	51.2	20	48.8	0.543
		Slightly disagree	29	9.7	9	31.0	20	69.0		10	34.5	19	65.5	
		Neutral	37	12.3	24	64.9	13	35.1		18	48.6	19	51.4	
		Slightly agree	70	23.3	42	60.0	28	40.0		36	51.4	34	48.6	
		Strongly agree	123	41.0	78	63.4	45	36.3		64	52.0	59	48.0	

* p<0.05; Statistically significant

DISCUSSION

The aim of this article is to assess and describe different opinions of patients on professionalism among the dentists. The system of assessment provides an opportunity for the patients and students to discuss the meaning, importance of professional behavior, on an individual basis. The survey aims at getting an assessment from the perspectives of general population on dental students and dentists based on appearance attitude, communication skill, treatment plan.^{[13][11]} Professional behavior, thus should be included as an integral part of the student curriculum. The demographics of the patients includes the age group from 18-70, 151 females, 149 males' patients from different socioeconomic status. The dress code contributes a major proportion on physical appearance. Only 18.7% of the patients in the study under report agreed that students should wear a white lab coat in preference to scrubs or surgical gowns. Majority of the survey population strongly agreed that formal clothes should be worn by the dentist and the dental students rather than casual attire.

However, Brosky and co-authors (2013) reported the opposite, when the survey was conducted.^[5] The population in the study are seemed to be that the physical features such as white lab coat strongly influences the patient's mindset about the treatment plan of the dentist rather scrubs or surgical gowns. The survey population has reported that the important characteristics features to be possessed by a dentist includes punctuality, Time management, Communication skills, Cleanliness of the work space and of instruments during appointments.^{[10][6]} Brosky had a similar opinion and perspectives regarding the communication aspects of the practitioners. A patient's first impression influences his/her perception of a dentist regarding the satisfaction, expectation with the dental procedures. Communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal) among patients, colleagues and other dental professional.^[15] The dentists time management, punctuality, responsibility are more important for dental professionalism. Dentists commitment in the form of dedication is considered important as this determines patient's opinion on treatment modalities. Other factors which the patients usually perceive dentist include humanism, competency in practice.^{[12][17]}

Professional competency of the dentist is usually referred as the ability of the practitioner to provide an adequate treatment options to the patients without any discrepancies.^{[7][16]} Patient responses in this study were somewhat different from the findings of several previous studies concerning the traditional patient preference for physicians to wear a white laboratory coat. The patient response revealed that 80% of them strongly disagree that the dentist attitude affects their comfort level and 56.3% strongly agree that the dentist attitude affects their anxiety level considerably.^[3] Professionalism is multi-factorial and is important in engendering a sense of comfort and confidence during treatment. 52% of the

population showed a neutral response that patient attitude can affect the confidence level on him/her.^{[11][16]} The nonverbal communication attributed to a dental care provider's attire/appearance can also play a major role in the patient/doctor relationship.^[6] Patients expected a working environment with infection control in this study 61.2% showed a neutral response that the dentist should follow clean working environment. An important phenomenon such as professionalism is influenced by environment and culture.^{[9][18]} In the survey population 62.5 % of the population strongly disagree that the dentist should use appropriate language and technical terms effectively. 52% of them strongly agree that the physical appearance an attitude is important for the dentist to be professional. Patient cooperation in treatment plan and execution plays a vital role for the dentist to be professional.^{[6][13]} The ability of a dentist to be professional is usually affected by various factors such as patient mindset, age, social background, society. A few years ago, patients played a passive role, with the thought that the health care provider knows best with respect to treatment plan.^[8] Patients and dentist's perception of professionalism and dental professional behavior must be included to ensure patient satisfaction. Patient involvement in the decision making of dental care they will receive is an important and essential step to achieve good dental service and to promote good patient-dentist relationship, optimal dental care with professionalism.^{[19][15]}

CONCLUSION

This survey among patients in Thai Moogambigai dental college and hospital showed that patients preferred a more formal dress attire for dental students. For dental students attire greatly affected both the comfort and the anxiety levels of patients. Makeup, hairstyle, facial hair, Jewelry appeared to have little effect on the patient's perceptions of students. Patients strongly agreed that dental students used appropriate language and displayed effective time management skills during their regular appointments first impressions of the dental students appeared to have a greater effect on patient's confidence levels. The dynamic nature of professionalism and their fact that contexts can shape the clinical practice. All should enhance the effective clinical practice as well as patient's professionalism.

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