

DENTAL EDUCATION FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Introduction. Oral health disparities constitute a significant public health challenge, with far-reaching consequences for the overall health of the population and economic ramifications for any nation. Introducing medical students to the field of dentistry and equipping them with essential knowledge about risk factors and preventive measures for common dental conditions can foster greater responsibility within the medical community towards oral health and enhance communication among healthcare specialists.

The objective of this study was to assess the opinions of students at the Faculty of Medicine regarding the Dental Medicine discipline.

Material and methods. This study involved conducting a survey among medical students in two stages: Stage I, before the commencement of the Dental Medicine module, and Stage II, upon its completion. In Stage I, data were collected from 356 fourth-year students at the Faculty of Medicine. Among them, 77% were high school graduates, 20% graduated from medical colleges, and 3% from other educational institutions. In Stage II, 386 students who had completed the Dental Medicine module were surveyed. The questionnaire consisted of general information about the participants and inquiries about the necessity and significance of including this discipline in the curriculum at the Faculty of Medicine.

Results. According to the gathered data from Stage I, 63.6% of respondents confirmed that Dental Medicine was a new subject for them. Additionally, 60.1% expressed their willingness to study it, 67.8% believed it would be beneficial, and 85.8% recognized a close connection between oral and general health. Regarding its inclusion in the curriculum, 65% considered it should be mandatory, while 35% suggested it be optional. After completing the module, 100% of participants acknowledged a strong correlation between oral health and general health. They asserted that Dental Medicine should be a compulsory discipline in the Faculty of Medicine's curriculum and is indispensable for medical students.

Conclusions. Introducing medical professionals to the field of dentistry, coupled with comprehensive knowledge of anatomical structures, physiological functions, and pathological conditions, enhances patient trust in the medical profession and fosters better inter-professional communication. Given that many oral conditions are preventable or treatable with early intervention, training physicians and actively involving them in oral disease prevention efforts can help mitigate oral health disparities and their adverse effects on overall health. Through oral screenings, preventive measures, referrals for dental assessments, and collaborations with dentists, physicians can positively impact oral health outcomes, especially in vulnerable populations.