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Editorial

Relation that Matters First in Dentistry – Dentist and Patient Relationship

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In the dentistry, the development of a good practitioner-patient relationship has been considered an essential attribute of the professional skills to be learned by students. Dental care has historically been characterized as generating more fear and anxiety than other forms of health care; indeed, patients' anxiety is usually mentioned as a contributing factor for low-quality oral health. Consequently, it is crucial to consider how dentists should act towards patients in order to establish rapport in the delivery of dental care. As a result, interpersonal and communication skills, the use of psychosocial and behavioral principles and effective communication with individuals from various patient populations, including those culturally different from the practitioner, are considered essential competencies for the general dentist.

A good practitioner-patient relationship comprises many issues that are transferable to all health professions. However, it is useful to study social interactions from a specialized point of view, considering the significant differences among the health professions. Practitioner-patient relationship skills have not been defined specifically for dental professionals; instead, criteria borrowed from medicine or psychology are typically applied, and the instruments for assessing skills lack dentist-defined criteria. Furthermore, relationship skills assessments in oral health have focused exclusively on consultation and have ignored intra- and postoperative communication and actions.

A successful dentist-patient relationship provides many benefits, such as increased patient adherence and loyalty, better therapeutic results, and anxiety management. High satisfaction levels among patients have been associated with their dentist. In contrast, poor communication is the most common cause of patient dissatisfaction. Previous research has found that training in specific relationship skills for dentists improves their social interactions and, consequently, patient satisfaction. Similarly, significant improvement has been reported in the interpersonal skills of dental students after they participate in social skills workshops. The development of social skills, as well as cognitive and technical skills, can be taught and retained.

Being a successful dental practitioner thus consists of not only cognitive knowledge and technical skills but also the ability to create rapport and a therapeutic relationship with patients. These can be achieved by using active communication strategies, perceiving the emotional states of patients, demonstrating empathy, and conducting treatment with a structured and professional approach. Social skills are key pillars in patient management, but additional strategies such as psychosocial and behavioral factors along with pharmacological and non-pharmacological techniques can also help when managing very anxious patients. Therefore, a good dentist-patient relationship includes an extensive set of skills, considering psychological and pharmacological aspects as well as interpersonal and communication skills.

