

Dentistry partners with Social Work and Community to train dental undergraduates to recognise, respond and refer in cases of domestic violence

Carrington, Ann; Croker, Felicity; Burmeister, Casey; Winson, Chad; Shield, William; Baker, Sandi

Background and rationale: The role of student dental practitioners in recognising and responding to domestic violence (DV) within a clinical setting has not been investigated previously in Australia. JCU students report feeling ill-prepared for responding appropriately to women who experience DV. An innovative partnership between Dentistry, Social Work and the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service collaboratively addressed this problem through an educational intervention and evaluation.

Methods: The aim was to explore dental students' perceptions of the effectiveness and value of the 'DV – Recognise, respond and refer' (DV-RRR) educational intervention and to inform dental curriculum design. A participatory action research design was employed utilising pre and post intervention surveys and focus groups to identify and document undergraduate dental students' understanding, perceptions and preparedness for responding appropriately to DV. The intervention involved the 'DV- RRR' workshops delivered by expert facilitators to dental students in clinical years 3 – 5. Perception on the value of training in this area and knowledge of DV before and after the workshops was compared and contrasted. Focus groups allowed rich descriptive data to be collected to enhance the analysis and develop a broader picture of the intervention and help guide the future development of the program.

Results: Students' knowledge regarding DV increased significantly. Focus group data confirmed the value of workshops and provided information that guided future development of the program. Students reported feeling enabled to embed awareness of DV into their clinical practice.

Evaluation/Implications for practice: Although the findings cannot be generalised, they suggest that this socially accountable, educational initiative should not only be embedded into the undergraduate curriculum but would also be valuable for other dental programs. In 2018 we are surveying graduates to assess implementation and impact and extending delivery of the DV-RRR to a range of practising dental professionals.

Key message: Further strengthening of dental students' capacity to respond to DV should be developed across the clinical years through authentic learning experiences that provide opportunities to practice techniques and employ strategies introduced in the workshops.