

# Barriers and enablers to conducting health promotion in private dental practice

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## Introduction

Oral disease is a significant public health issue in Australia, with an annual economic burden of more than \$6.2 million.<sup>(1)</sup> Despite being largely preventable, dental caries ranks as Australia's most prevalent chronic disease.<sup>(2)</sup>

Dentists are integral in the prevention and management of oral disease, primarily through preventative and restorative clinical work. Health promotion is an important part of this, encompassing a range of strategies that can be employed by dentists.

A literature review found limited studies exploring the experience and perception of dentists towards incorporating health promotion into their practice.

To help address this gap a qualitative study of private practice dentists residing in Cairns, far north Queensland was conducted in 2014.



## Aim

*To explore the experience and perceptions of dentists towards conducting health promotion in their practice, and understand the barriers and enablers to doing this*

## Methodology

- ☞ Phenomenological research design
- ☞ 41 private practice dentists were invited to participate using purposive modified snowball sampling
- ☞ Semi-structured interviews were chosen to optimize participation of dentists during practice hours



## Results

Thirteen private practice dentists were interviewed. A snapshot of key themes :

### **Dentists' understanding, views and experience of health promotion**

- ☞ The majority of dentists recognize health promotion as essential in the prevention of oral disease
- ☞ Few dentists believed they have a responsibility to provide health promotion
- ☞ One on one education was the most commonly identified health promotion strategy
- ☞ Some dentists had experience in midstream strategies such as school education; few dentists identified experience in upstream health promotion strategies

*I think the best way for health promotion to be done is on a 1 on 1 basis. There should be more emphasis on the patient... dentists should spend more time with patients giving them oral hygiene instructions. They basically just get them in and out. (D2:Female)*

### **Perceived barriers towards incorporating health promotion into practice**

- ☞ Time , money & lack of resources
- ☞ Government policies and lack of support
- ☞ Patients - due to perceived lack of education, irregular attendance patterns and attitude
- ☞ Dentists - due to attitude, fear of information overload to patients and lack of confidence in delivering health promotion strategies

### **Perceived enablers towards incorporating health promotion into practice**

- ☞ Auxiliary staff such as dental hygienists, dental therapists, oral health therapists and dental assistants
- ☞ Dentists' knowledge, positive attitude and motivation
- ☞ Support from Australian Dental Association
- ☞ Health promotion education during university

*We also get auxiliary staff involved. They are very important too. If you are out of the room they need to be knowledgeable. (D4:Female)*

### **Other factors influencing participation in health promotion**

- ☞ Becoming a parent
- ☞ Being a practice owner (positive and negative influence)
- ☞ Years of practice experience (positive and negative influence)

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates a need to focus on developing the capacity and skills of dentists in conducting health promotion in their practice.

The findings are being used to improve health promotion training for students currently studying Bachelor of Dental Surgery at James Cook University, Cairns.

