I think there are a number of reasons for this lack of data. For example, oral health promotion has taken some time to be accepted and implemented into higher education. One of the main obstacles however is that the ethos of dentistry itself is still very much centred on individual-care, rather than a holistic approach. This is deeply ingrained in the culture of the profession, making it difficult to incorporate oral health promotion.

Dentistry is also firmly rooted in the medical model of health, which does not fit well with the underpinning ideas of oral health promotion.

Should dental schools generally be required to offer more oral health promotion in their degrees?

In Australia and other countries, health promotion is a competency for dentists and oral health therapists (hygienists and therapists). Therefore, health promotion training does occur to some extent in these courses. In theory, graduating dental professionals should be able to understand oral health promotion and be able to apply this knowledge in the field.

However, there needs to be evaluation of this training in my opinion. At this stage, oral health promotion training is often a tick-box exercise: it just has to be somewhere in the course to meet this competency. There appears to be little regard as to whether the students’ understanding of health promotion is adequate and whether this will lead to long-term application once they have graduated. What I would like to see are dental professionals who have a solid understanding of things like the social determinants of health and have the ability to take these into account when treating patients.

Are dental schools adequately prepared to teach oral health promotion?

To some extent, dental schools are prepared. In Australia, this training is actually happening and it differs between schools as to who delivers this training, either dental professionals or public health professionals.

However, I think for oral health promotion training to be successful it needs to be integrated into the whole course and not separated from the clinical content. It must also be monitored and evaluated. At this stage, I do not think that this is being done adequately, so there is definitely room for improvement.

Thank you very much for the interview.

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