



PUBLIC HEALTH IN DENTISTRY

Introduction

Without interprofessional cooperation we cannot effectively improve the care services for our population. Over the course of many years, healthcare associations implemented cross-disciplinary partnerships and suggested more comprehensive medical training.

We commend the expertise provided through public health education and professionals in reducing the burden of oral disease. As per recent data, 5,0 % of the European Union (EU) population still has unmet dental care needs (1). Dental professionals alone have restricted resources to meet demand without proper planning, evaluation, and assessment of existing healthcare provision systems and population needs.

Interactions between public health and dental medicine enable access for communities that would otherwise be excluded from healthcare services. The increased attention to underserved populations in rural areas and emerging Public health trends, such as, ageing population or financial distress pose an opportunity to reevaluate barriers existing in care accessibility and position oral diseases amongst other lead needs. Working closely within the frameworks of primary health care allows disseminating

critical aspects of dental prophylaxis and increasing its effectiveness. Population-based interventions provide an opportunity to strengthen the importance of oral health within the context of systemic health, creating a supportive environment for dental professionals. Furthermore, training gained through community interventions prompts a greater appreciation for the social determinants of health (2).

As oral health gains momentum with the adoption of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global strategy on oral health and the incorporation of dental products (fluoride toothpaste, silver diamine fluoride, glass ionomer cement) onto the Model List of Essential Medicines (3), dental professionals have the opportunity to act as a motor for reform on all socio-political levels. These examples of successful cooperation between disciplines considered in brief demonstrate the necessity for further integration.

All educational institutions delivering dental training provide some form of dental public health teaching and two in three among them have a department or section dedicated to teaching it (4). Said departments exist under various names, with diverse curricula and methods of teaching, such as preventive dentistry, community dentistry, DPH [4]. Set out by Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) *Profile and competences for the graduating European dentist* and its steady collaboration with The European Association of Dental Public Health (EADPH) pave the way for an integral position of public health competences in dental education.

Definitions

Public Health (PH)	"Public health aims to improve the health of populations by keeping people healthy, improving their health and by preventing disease (5)."
Primary Health care (PHC)	"PHC is a whole-of-society approach to health that aims at ensuring the highest possible level of health and well-being and their equitable distribution by focusing on people's needs and as early as possible along the continuum from health promotion and disease prevention to treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care, and as close as feasible to people's everyday environment (6)."
Dental Public Health (DPH)	"The science and art of preventing and controlling dental diseases and promoting dental health through organized community efforts (7)."

Social determinants of health	"Nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life (8)."
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Purpose

This policy aims to show EDSA's recognition of the significance of integrating public health within dental frameworks and signal interest in engaging in further collaboration. The policy strives to highlight the benefits derived from interprofessional collaboration in reducing the burden of oral disease. Equally, we suggest cross-European standardization in undergraduate and postgraduate recognition of Dental Public Health. Whilst maintaining its specificity to community and country-based frameworks, dental public health curricula should recognize issues shared across the continent. This policy supports and aligns with the efforts of EDSA's partner organizations in nurturing appropriate competences in dental students and early-career professionals.

Scope

This policy applies to the wider EDSA community with the goal of raising awareness about the importance of interprofessional cooperation between dental care providers and public health specialists. The policy serves as a motor for integrating students in the collaborative process between professional associations, educational institutions, researchers, non-governmental organizations, patients, and policy-makers in implementing population health perspectives. Dental public health education promotes building a workforce aware of socioeconomic implications, barriers to health access, and oral health disparities addressed with evidence-based strategies. As such duals theoretical and clinical collaboration between the disciplines in improving quality, accessibility, affordability and equity in the field of dental care.

Policy Statement

EDSA calls on educational institutions to:

- Firmly implement public health into the wider dental curriculum, to ensure broad awareness about the connection between oral health and public health.
- Share effective dental-public health collaboration practices in medical education and community service.
- Promote the importance of preventive measures through education and community outreach to address the rise in oral health inequalities.
- Support population-based research in the field of dental public health to support policy, regulation, and legislation development.
- Facilitate surveillance of the situation of oral health needs and evaluate existing systems of dental care delivery.
- Make oral health promotion and disease prevention (risk factors, tumor screening) more visible within all clinical and non-clinical courses.
- Review existing curricula in dental public health to reflect the changing needs of our population.
- Highlight the importance of cultural competency and leadership through dental public health teaching.
- Include epidemiologists, statisticians, sociologists, lawyers and public health professionals in developing comprehensive teaching and community intervention plans.
- Support student-led advocacy efforts in oral health promotion, as a way of addressing and limiting oral health disparities.
- Support evidence-based community projects to directly contribute to the improvement of the well-being within collaborative efforts of primary healthcare.
- Incorporate technological advancements in preventive strategies and monitoring of dental diseases.
- Follow other policies in this regard with a good reputation (e.g. WHO/FDI/EAPHD).
- Recognize and strengthen the importance of dental sciences within public health teaching.
- Demonstrate improvements in healthcare accessibility through teaching and clinical excellence, introducing cost-effective practices to confront the implications of the social determinants of health.

EDSA calls on Healthcare providers to:

- Reevaluate the position of dental treatment within existing systems by applying an integrated approach towards oral health fundamentals.
- Follow other policies in this regard with a good reputation (e.g. WHO/FDI/EAPHD).
- Incorporate technological advancements in preventive strategies and monitoring of dental diseases.

Roles and Responsibilities

The EDSA Delegates, Board of Directors and Officers, Supervisory Board, and members are in charge of spreading awareness about the organization's "Public Health in Dentistry" policy and amending it every year in order to evaluate and highlight progress and improvement.

Educational institutions are responsible for implementing policy recommendations and ensuring that proposed policies are adopted. This policy describes the set of measures, initiatives, and actions that will be implemented as interventions, organized by strategic objectives.

Related Document

This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- WHO's Global Strategy on Oral Health
- FDI's Vision 2030
- The State of Oral Health in Europe (author: Dr Reena Patel)
- ADEE's *Profile and competences for the graduating European dentist*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Contact

Any queries regarding this policy should be directed to the EDSA Policy Officer (policy_officer@edsaweb.org).

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by EDSA every year.

References

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8. *Social Determinants of Health* (2022) *NCHHSTP Social Determinants of Health*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/socialdeterminants/index.html> (Accessed: February 11, 2023).