

Dental Anxiety Management Techniques of North Carolina Dental Hygienists

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INTRODUCTION

Background:

- Dental anxiety: a cognitive and emotional response of fear or stress regarding dental environments¹
 - 15% adults affected worldwide²
 - 12-29% children and adolescents affected worldwide³
- Anxious patients are more likely to avoid dental care which can worsen pre-existing dental issues⁴
- Oral health providers are responsible for recognizing and effectively managing dental anxiety
- Dental hygienists (DHs) are in a prime position to manage patients with dental anxiety

Purpose:

To evaluate dental anxiety management techniques (DAMTs) by DHs in North Carolina (NC) by:

- Determining DAMTs that are most frequently utilized
- Gauging the knowledge, confidence level with DAMTs, and willingness to implement DAMTs

METHODS

Ethics

UNC IRB #23-2406 (Exempt)

Recruitment

Purposeful sampling using NC dental board email list

Participants

Practicing DHs in NC

Incentives

Drawing of two \$50 gift cards

Data Collection

15-minute Qualtrics® survey

Question Format

Multiple choice, select-all, Likert-scale, open-ended

Question Categories

Demographics, knowledge, education, experience, confidence, willingness

Analysis

Descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis, thematic analysis

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ADAMS SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY



North Carolina dental hygienists regularly treat patients with dental anxiety. However, they are unaware of the several available dental anxiety management techniques.



Abstract accessible via QR code

RESULTS

Total participants (N=632)

Treated a patient with dental anxiety (n=629)	98.89%
Patients with dental anxiety treated per week (n=605)	8.67
Altered care for a patient with dental anxiety (n=522)	88.75%

Table 1: NC DH Experience with Patient Dental Anxiety

	DAMT	Knowledge (n=598)	Utilization (n=556)
Physical	Tapping	33.28%	30.58%
	Weighted blanket	72.91%	54.86%
	Acupuncture	13.04%	0.72%
Psychotherapeutic	Music	84.45%	81.65%
	Aromatherapy	34.62%	21.22%
	Storytelling	47.32%	52.70%
	Breathing exercises	58.36%	57.55%
	Progressive muscle relaxations	10.03%	4.50%
	Hypnotherapy	8.03%	0.36%
	Virtual reality exposure therapy/ Guided imagery	11.87%	7.19%
	Biofeedback/ Cognitive and behavioral therapy	16.56%	12.05%
Verbal	Desensitization visits	33.11%	28.60%
	Positive reinforcements/ Trust building	96.66%	96.40%
Pharmacotherapy	Information and explanation	95.32%	93.71%
	Nitrous oxide sedation	75.92%	61.87%
	Intravenous sedation	36.79%	11.33%
	Oral medication	78.26%	62.05%

Table 2: Knowledge and Utilization of DAMTs

CONCLUSIONS

- DHs reported regular treatment of patients with dental anxiety
- There was limited knowledge and utilization of the various available DAMTs
- DHs expressed general interest in continuing their dental anxiety management education

Limitations

Single survey study
NC practice restriction
Limited to NC DH providers

Future Direction

Pre- and post-survey study
Expanding nationwide
Including other members of dental team

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