

Awareness of Oral Medicine Specialty among Medical Practitioners and Medical Students in Punjab: A Survey

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ABSTRACT

Aims and objectives: To create awareness among medical practitioners and medical students about oral medicine branch in dentistry, and to assess the number of oral health cases they come around in their general practice, and whom they refer these patients to.

Materials and methods: A self-designed questionnaire consisting of total 13 questions was created using google forms and was circulated online to medical practitioners and medical students in Punjab and results were analysed.

Results: It's very shocking to find out that only moderate number of doctors were aware about oral medicine branch and the role of oral medicine specialty, others have just heard about it or even didn't know about it at all. The Results of our study also reveal that a majority of the medical practitioners have never collaborated or referred the patients to dentist despite of having a large number of patients who frequently reported oral health conditions, including tmj which was also reported frequently.

Conclusion: Primary prevention of disease is the best approach but often difficult to achieve. In primary care, physicians and dentists should collaborate and share information to improve patient health outcomes. We can empower medical practitioners to recognize the importance of oral health assessments, early detection of oral diseases, and timely referrals to oral medicine specialist.

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INTRODUCTION

In the complicated web of healthcare, where specialties intertwine and overlap, oral medicine stands out as a beacon of comprehensive patient care. Nevertheless, despite the wide landscape of medical knowledge, there remains a significant gap in awareness among medical practitioners about the crucial role of oral medicine. Many medical practitioners are unaware of the important implications of oral medicine for overall health.

Oral Medicine is a specialized field of dentistry that focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of oral mucosal illnesses, orofacial pain syndromes, and oral symptoms of systemic diseases. Oral Medicine professionals have competence in recognizing, diagnosing, and treating a wide range of oral health conditions, including oral malignancies, autoimmune disorders of the mouth, and infectious infections.

Medical practitioners frequently see patients who present with a variety of symptoms, some of which may be related to oral health issues. Despite this, the importance of dental health in overall patient care is sometimes overlooked in the medical community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A self-designed questionnaire consisting of total 13 questions was created using google forms. The survey was circulated among the total of 70 medical practitioners and medical students online in Punjab via email and social media like Facebook, WhatsApp etc. Data was collected from electronic questionnaire and the results were analysed.

RESULTS

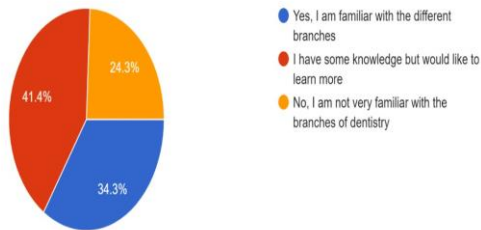
Among 70 study subjects, 17 subjects (24.3%) didn't even know about the existing branches in dentistry, only 34.3% were

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aware about the existing branches ,and about 41.4% have some knowledge but would like to know more.

1.) Are you familiar with the various branches of dentistry and their respective specialties in patient care?

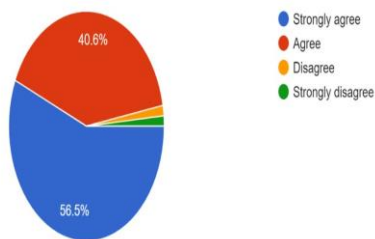
70 responses



56.4% participants strongly agreed that oral health is strongly linked to overall health,40.6% agree and only 2.8% disagrees

2.) Do you believe that oral health is closely linked to overall health?

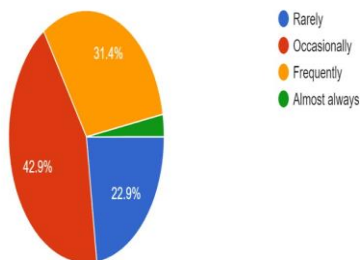
69 responses



22.9% subjects rarely encountered oral health conditions in their practise ,whereas 31.4% frequently encountered and 42.9% encountered only occasionally

3.) How often do you encounter oral health conditions in your practice?

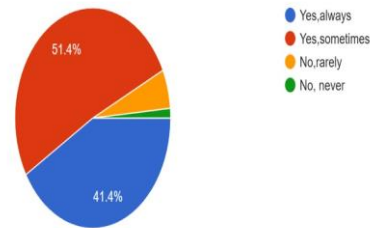
70 responses



41.4% subjects always referred patients with oral diseases to dental specialist for further evaluation and treatment, whereas 51.4% referred sometimes and remaining 5.7% rarely referred .

4.) Do you typically refer patients to dental specialists for further evaluation or treatment of oral diseases?

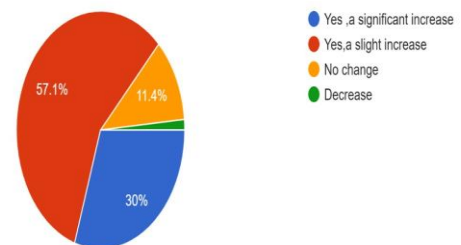
70 responses



The participants were questioned about the whether there was increase in the recent patients presenting with oral concerns where 30% participants responded yes with a significant response and 57.1% with slight increase and 11.4% with reported no change

5.) Have you noticed an increase in the number of patients presenting with oral health concerns recently?

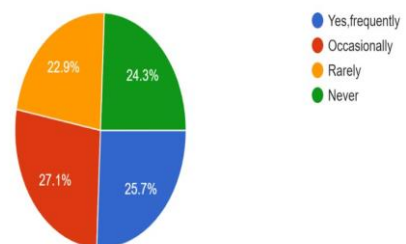
70 responses



24.3% subjects reported that they never collaborated with dentist for oral health issues,22.9% rarely and 27.1% reported occasionally with only 25.7% that frequently collaborated

6.)Have you ever collaborated with a dentist or referred patients to a dental specialist for oral health issues?

70 responses

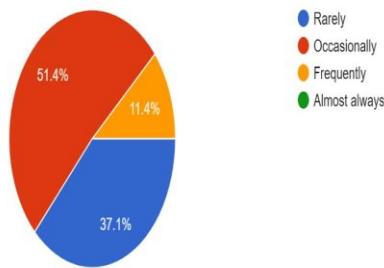


51.4% subjects reported patients with tmj disorder occasionally while 11.4% reported frequently and 37.1% reported only rarely

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7.) How frequently do you encounter patients with TMJ disorders in your practice?

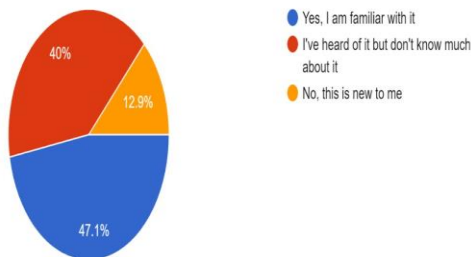
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When asked about the oral medicine branch 40% subjects were familiar, whereas 47.1% didn't know much about it and 12.9% had never heard about it

8.) Have you heard of the field of oral medicine before?

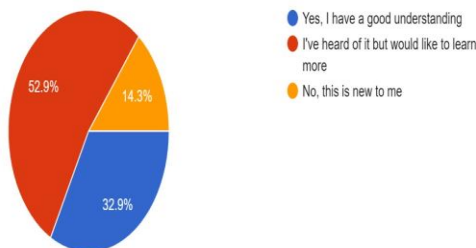
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When asked about the role of oral medicine 52.9% reported that they have only heard about it but didn't know much about this, 32.9% having good understanding whereas it was new to the rest 14.3%

9.) Are you familiar with the role of oral medicine in diagnosing and managing oral mucosal diseases and other oral health conditions?

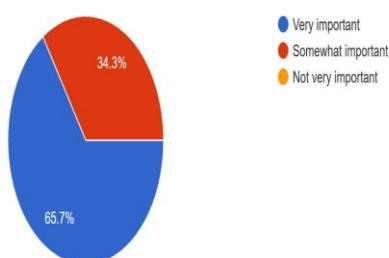
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65.7% subjects agreed that oral medicine field is very important in overall health care system, 34.3% saying somewhat important

10.) How important do you think the field of oral medicine is in the overall healthcare system?

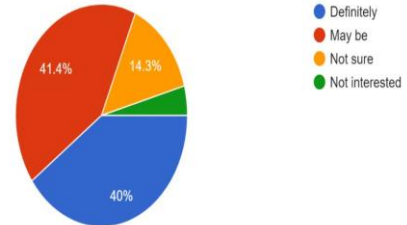
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When asked about if they would be interested in attending workshops or training sessions 45% were definitely interested, 41.1% may be, 14.3% not sure

11.) Would you be interested in attending workshops or training sessions to enhance your knowledge of oral medicine?

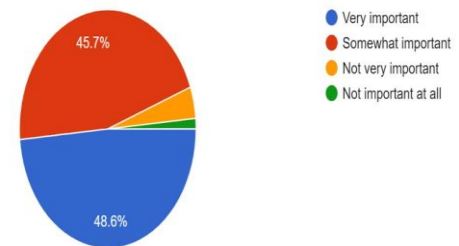
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48.6% agreed that it's very important, 45.7% somewhat important for general practitioners to have basic knowledge of oral medicine

12.) How important do you think it is for general practitioners to have basic knowledge of oral medicine?

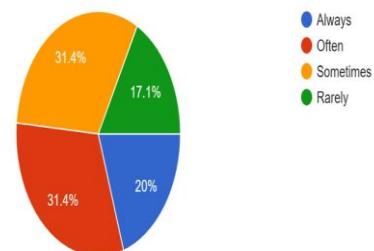
70 responses



Only 20% of the subjects conducted oral health screenings during routine checkups, 17.7% rarely, and the rest 31.4% conducted often or sometimes

13.) How often do you conduct oral health screenings during routine check-ups?

70 responses



DISCUSSION

As it is always said "Healthy mouth is a sign of healthy body" which emphasizes the intricate relationship between dental health and overall well-being. Dental and medical practitioners are essential components of comprehensive health care team but still the presence of such teamwork is still unclear in India. The prime goal of both the professions should be patient's health. Lack of awareness among medical doctors might lead to delay in treatment compromising the patients' health.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

As the awareness of oral medicine specialty remains limited among general medical practitioners here are some recommendations to enhance awareness of oral medicine within the medical community, facilitating early detection, timely referrals, and integrated management of oral health conditions.

- 1.Facilitate Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Referral Networks
2. Promote Oral Health Screening and Assessment
3. Create online instructional modules, webinars, and interactive platforms to help general practitioners understand oral medicine.
4. Provide clinical rotations or elective courses in oral medicine to expose medical students to oral health assessments, oral pathology, and interdisciplinary care models
5. Conduct combined conferences for medical and dental professionals
6. By conducting more surveys for the awareness

CONCLUSION

The current situation is concerning highlighting the need to create awareness among medical practitioners. This is likely the only study done in the region to asses and create awareness among medical practitioners. While raising awareness of oral medicine among general practitioners remains a challenge, intensive initiatives are underway to close the gap and encourage interdisciplinary teamwork in patient treatment. Medical and dental professionals aim to optimize patients' health. By integrating oral medicine education into medical curriculum, providing education

programme, conferences, and collaborations. We can empower medical practitioners to recognize the importance of oral health assessments, early detection of oral diseases, and timely referrals to oral medicine specialist.

Primary prevention of disease is the best approach but often difficult to achieve. In primary care, physicians and dentists should collaborate and share information to improve patient health outcomes

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