

DISCIPLINE OF FAMILY DENTISTRY

Change of Name from General Dental Practitioners to Family Dental Practitioners.

Family Dentistry as a Specialty ?

Family dentistry forms the foundation of family practice in dentistry. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for addressing the diverse range of issues presented by patients and their families.

Unlike specialized fields, family dentistry is characterized by its breadth of expertise rather than depth. It draws on a wide understanding of various clinical disciplines vis-a-vis Oral Medicine, Oral Surgery, Orthodontics & Restorative Dentistry, Prosthetic Dentistry, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and community dentistry, offers comprehensive care without delving deeply into any specific specialty.

Family dentists, as generalists, possess knowledge of common ailments within various clinical disciplines, encountered within the community rather than in a hospital setting. They often rely on clinical judgment for diagnosis, minimizing the need for extensive investigations. Their approach involves evaluating illnesses in physical, psychological, and social dimensions, emphasizing a holistic patient management strategy.

Due to their extensive knowledge, family dentists can identify patients requiring specialized care from specialists in particular fields. For instance, when presented with a patient complaining of toothache, a family dentist discerns whether it's a simple cavity treatable in primary care, or a case of acute Pulpitis necessitating surgical intervention. Consequently, specialists receive patients referred to by a Family Dentist. Dental Specialists, with their in-depth expertise and advanced diagnostic tools, address severe and rare disease variants within their specialty, typically in a hospital environment.

In addition to comprehensive clinical knowledge, family dentistry also encompasses an understanding of behavioral sciences. This includes grasping concepts like ill health, illness behavior, doctor-patient relationships, the impact of family dynamics on health, and vice versa, as well as managing severe debilitating conditions.

The skills integral to family dentistry encompass effective communication, counseling, adept problem-solving for undifferentiated illnesses, and cost-effective management within the family and community context. Preventive skills are also crucial as family oral health revolves around disease prevention and the maintenance of individual and familial well-being within the community. Finally, family dentistry calls for an attitude of respecting the patient as a person seeking assistance, rather than reducing them to a mere ailment to be cured.

As aptly articulated by Sir William Osler in 1904, "It is much more important to know what sort of patient a disease has than what sort of disease a patient has."

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Family Dental Practitioner

Definition of Family Dentistry

'Family Dentistry is a Discipline of Dentistry which provides oral health care to individuals within the context of the family and community, irrespective of race, culture, or social class. They are equipped to address a wide array of problems, be they physical, psychological, or social, regardless of age, sex, or nature of the presenting complaint. Their training equips them with a unique set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes qualifying them to offer initial contact care and comprehensive dental care to the entire family. Family dentists shoulder the responsibility of providing ongoing, patient-centered care and facilitate the coordination of health care through appropriate consultant and community resource utilization. In his or her clinic the Dentist works as a leader of the Dental team perhaps comprising of associates Dental Surgery Nurse Assistants, Dental Laboratory Technicians, Receptionist, Dental Office Manager and Other Staff.

Principles of Family Dentistry

Ideally, family dentists should: Reside in the community where they practice, ensuring accessibility and availability to their patients.

They are committed to patients as individuals in need of help, regardless of age, sex, or nature of the issue. They understand the context of the patient's illness.

They regard the patient as the constant, with the episode being the disease and recognize the significance of the dentist's attitudes, values, and emotions in oral health care practice. they

attend to patients in the office, at home, or in a hospital setting. Family Dentist consider every consultation as an opportunity for disease prevention and health promotion, with an emphasis on oral health. Family practice serves as a hub for health resources within the community and the hospital, managing these resources effectively.

Roles and Functions of the Family Dentist

The roles of the family dentist embody the general function of primary care and encompass various types of care provided by Family Dentists. The integration of these diverse forms of care at the primary care level has demonstrated enhanced health outcomes.

The role of the dental team with the family Dentist as the leader is expanding to performing complex procedure. Family Dentists are undertaking more aesthetic and cosmetic procedure like crown and bridge work and oral implants in the field of Dental aesthetic Family Dentist undertake procedure like Botox logy, Labioplasty, Oral lifts, Peels and Pinnaplasty, Palpebral Rejuvenation, Skin Rejuvenation, and total Facial Rejuvenation.

The Family Dentist undertakes the many new courses available to acquire these skills.

First Contact Care: Family dentists serve as initial points of contact, operating at the primary care level within the community. Accessibility and availability are imperative for this function. Ideally, family dentists should reside in the community where they practice. This proximity grants them firsthand knowledge of prevalent health issues in the community.

Patient-Centered Care and Family Care: Family dentists extend patient-centered, personalized care to both patients and their families. Their approach shifts from viewing diseases to understanding patients as individuals with specific needs. This personal connection is facilitated by the enduring relationships developed over time.

Continuity of Care: Family dentists ensure continuity of care by tending to patients and their families over many years. They consider the patient as the consistent element, with each episode of illness being addressed as an isolated event. This continuity is observed in three dimensions: longitudinal, interpersonal, and informational.

Longitudinal continuity entails seeing a patient's problem from inception to resolution. This may involve primary care treatment for minor illnesses, or referral for specialized care in more severe cases.

Interpersonal continuity builds on longitudinal care, involving an ongoing commitment to the patient's well-being rooted in trust. It enables the Family Dentist to monitor changes in symptoms or treatment outcomes over time, often obviating the need for costly investigations.

Informational continuity necessitates maintaining detailed records of a patient's health issues over an extended period, ensuring high-quality care. These records can be either paper-based or electronic, requiring the Family Dentist to possess technical proficiency.

Continuity of care has been shown to improve treatment adherence, increase patient-dentist satisfaction, and lead to better health outcomes.

Comprehensive Care: Family Dentists provide holistic care, encompassing the patient's physical, psychological, and social dimensions. This comprehensive approach involves assessing the patient's problem and managing them within their familial and community context, employing both curative and preventive measures.

Preventive Care: Family dentists are ideally positioned to practice preventive care and promote their patients' health. Preventive care operates at three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention aims to prevent or remove the cause of a health problem before it arises. Secondary prevention focuses on early detection and treatment of health issues. Tertiary prevention aims to reduce functional impairment resulting from an acute or chronic health problem.

Coordination of Care: Family dentists play a vital role in utilizing all available healthcare resources in the community or hospital for the benefit of their patients. While family dentists are adept at handling most patient concerns, there will be instances necessitating referral to specialists with highly specialized skills. This coordination entails a deep understanding of the patient's background, the nature and severity of the illness, and knowledge of available specialists and health facilities in the community.

In summary, the family dentist embodies the attributes of a "five-star doctor" described by Charles Boelen. In a healthcare system centered on people's needs, this doctor symbolizes excellence by embodying five fundamental qualities: Adapted from Charles Boelen WHO 1994

Profile of a "Five Star Doctor."

- **Care Provider**, who considers the Patient holistically as an individual and as an integral part of a family and the community, and provides high quality, comprehensive, continuous, and personalized care within a long-term relationship based on trust.
- **Decision maker**, who chooses which technologies to apply ethically and cost – effectively while enhancing the care he or she provides.

- **Communicator**, who is able to promote healthy lifestyle by effective explanation and advocacy, thereby empowering individuals and groups to enhance and protect their health.
- **Community leader**, who, having won the trust of the people among whom he or she works, can reconcile individual and community health requirements and initiate action on behalf of the community.
- **Manager**, who can work harmoniously with individuals and organizations inside and outside the health system to meet the needs of patients and communities, making appropriate use of available health data.

The “**Five Star Doctor**” is ideally suited to work in a health service based on people’s needs and based on an integrated approach that embodies the values of quality, equity, relevance, and cost effectiveness.

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