

Other journals in brief

A selection of abstracts of clinically relevant papers from other journals.
The abstracts on this page have been chosen and edited by Paul Hellyer.

What to teach dental undergraduates?

Lynch C D, Blum I, Wilson N H F. Leadership in dental education. *J Dent* 2019; **87**: 7–9.

The conundrum needs strong leaders.

Balancing the needs of: a) the future dental workforce b); the practitioners who will employ new graduates; and c) patients with changing expectations and disease patterns, challenges dental educators. Within a curriculum designed to educate new graduates to 'safe beginners' level with the clinical skills expected by experienced trainers, finding time to teach the relevance of the role of molecular biology in health and disease, and a thorough knowledge of systemic diseases and dentists' role in prevention is difficult.

Teaching contemporary clinical techniques such as minimally invasive dentistry, the concept of sealing in caries and rotary endodontics may represent a skills mismatch between established practitioners and new graduates. Other difficulties include the recruitment of appropriate patients from the inner city locations of many dental schools where surrounding populations are either transient or 'aged' (a relevant characteristic for patients today, surely?) and the focus on securing funding for research and the career progression of academics. Solutions include outreach teaching and the possibility of more teaching by appropriately trained GDPs, thus reducing the need for clinical academics to teach.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-019-0946-7>

Powerful, yet frustrated

Holden A C L. Dentistry and oral health in online media sources: a discourse analysis. *Community Dent Health* 2019; **36**: 221–228.

How does the media view the dental profession?

The fluidity of the relationship between the dental profession and society is viewed through the lens of online media. Google News was searched on one day for all mentions of dentistry and oral health. 171 articles were reviewed from a mixture of newspapers and online content from consumer groups. Analysis revealed 3 themes. Firstly, power and professional status, illustrated by stories of either professional malpractice or mistreatment of employees; secondly, advancement of social control, with articles stressing the relationship between oral and general health; thirdly, neo-liberal attitudes towards oral healthcare (taking personal responsibility for one's own care), which highlighted the relative lack of funding for oral healthcare and dentists' 'anger and disappointment' at the lack of appropriate affordable access to oral care.

The author suggests that an unequal relationship between the public and the profession leads to disempowerment and that 'if many in society cannot access care, the principle justification for dentistry's position as a trusted and protected profession falls into question.'

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-019-0972-5>

Frailty and oral health

Shwe P S, Ward S A, Thein P M, Junckerstorff R. Frailty, oral health and nutrition in geriatrics inpatients: A cross-sectional study. *Gerodontology* 2019; **36**: 223–228.

Hakee F F, Bernabé E, Sabbah W. Association between oral health and frailty: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Gerodontology* 2019; **36**: 205–215.

No evidence of causation but a clear link is shown.

Frailty is a state of reduced physiological reserve and high vulnerability to stress, and features weakness, weight loss, falls and impaired mobility. The causes are multi-factorial and the changes in health status lead to increased dependency on others. Prevalence in community dwelling older adults is estimated at 15%.

Postulated mechanisms through which poor oral health may lead to frailty include poor nutrition due to an inability to consume a healthy diet, psycho-social effects such as lack of self esteem and decreased quality of life and the chronic inflammation typical of oral disease which alters the metabolism of other major organs.

The cross sectional study of Schwe *et al.* examined oral health status, a measurement of frailty and other variables in patients admitted for geriatric assessment to a sub-acute hospital over a five month period. 168 patients, with a median age of 82, gave informed consent to participate in the study. 85% of participants had poor self reported oral health. Only 19% had normal nutritional status and only 15% considered to be non-frail. Non-frail patients reported more frequent visits to the dentist, a higher level of education, had better nutrition and better self reported oral health than frail patients. On discharge, the majority of patients returned home.

The literature review, carried out by Hakee, Bernabé and Sabbah, examined studies which had looked at the longitudinal relationship between oral health at baseline and frailty over time. Five papers were found which fulfilled the search criteria, all of which used the same measure of frailty (Fried's phenotype model). The review suggests that malnutrition is significantly associated with frailty, related to dry mouth, fewer functional teeth and decreased bite force. The relationship of frailty to the inflammatory pathway was found to be not strong, with limited evidence that periodontal disease was associated with the development of frailty. Further research is required.

These papers suggest that poor oral health may be both a predictor and a marker for frailty. Since oral health is a modifiable risk factor, the importance of assessing oral health in frailty assessments is highlighted. Improving oral health, and consequently improving nutritional intake, should be included in health promotion in interventions to prevent or delay the onset of frailty.

If declining oral health is a marker for the onset of frailty, and the majority of older people at risk of developing frailty are living in the community, then the role of the general dental practitioner, particularly those with long standing relationships with their patients, in identifying those at risk should be highlighted.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-019-0971-6>