

Interprofessional perio training – does it work?

Interprofessional enhanced skills training in periodontology: a qualitative study of one London pilot
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Health Education England developed a pilot educational and training initiative for enhancing skills in periodontology for both dentists and dental hygienists/therapists. The two-year programme began in 2011 at King's College Hospital and included one day of training per fortnight. This initiative was based on the concept of 'Dentists with Special Interests', which aimed to train practitioners working in primary care to provide supplementary services

in addition to their generalist role, addressing the 'gap' between primary and tertiary care. An 'interprofessional model' was considered important as professionals are required to work in a team setting and a significant proportion of periodontal care is provided by dental hygienists/therapists.

This qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of those involved in initiating, designing, delivering and participating in this interprofessional approach to training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of key stakeholders including the course participants, education and training commissioners as well as providers. The interviews were conducted towards the end of the two-year programme and based on a topic guide informed by health services and policy literature. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

A total of 22 key stakeholders participated in the interviews. Out of the 19 participants on the course, 12 agreed to be interviewed (four dentists and eight hygienists/therapists). Out of the 27 other stakeholders invited to participate, ten agreed, which included two representatives from Health Education England, one representative from Dental Public Health, six

course educators and training providers, and one practice principal. NHS Commissioners of the training course did not respond and this was later acknowledged as a potential limitation of the study.

Although certain challenges were identified in designing and teaching a course bringing together different professional backgrounds and level of skills, the authors conclude that the experiences of all key stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive. There was evidence of 'creative interprofessional learning', which led to 'enhancing team working', 'enabling role recognition' and 'equipping participants for delivery of new models of care'. Recommendations emerged for future training initiatives, wider health policy and systems to enable participants on future enhanced skills courses in periodontology to apply these skills in clinical practice. The authors suggest that this model of training should be piloted for other aspects of dental care but emphasise the importance of taking on board the learning from this initiative. They recommend that evaluation processes should be built into future training to enable longitudinal evaluation from inception to end.

By Reena Wadia
BDJ Research Insights Team