

# Letter to Editor

## Oral Health Education for Medical Students: An Overlooked Connection?



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Since there is a wide range of diseases and health problems, physicians take steps to diagnose or treat them or, in some cases, refer the patients to specialists at their own discretion. One of these specialties is dentistry, which deals with oral diseases and, of course, is completely separated from medicine. Since oral diseases are the source of many health problems, oral health should be considered important for the community health; therefore, community health can be achieved by maintaining oral health. Medical professionals are at the forefront of community health care, which is why the majority of people visit them for treating their health problems [1]. However, medical professionals generally receive little education about oral health and unfortunately cannot provide appropriate measures or give advice to patients in case of an emergency [2].

Although the association between oral problems and systemic diseases needs further investigation, about 100 systemic diseases with oral health connection have been identified so far, including diabetes, pregnancy-related complications, and pulmonary diseases [3]. Other studies have revealed the relationship of periodontal disease with stroke, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, dementia, and mortality [4]. Nowadays, hospital emergency wards are increasingly dealing with patients with oral problems.

This reminds the need for physicians who know about oral health to treat or refer these patients to dental clinics. In addition, there are many poor people in the community who cannot afford oral health care, despite receiving medical care, and have high rate of oral diseases [5].

In spite of the close association of oral health with systemic diseases and some systemic consequences, the gap between medical and dental education has received little attention since 1840, when the first dental school in the United States was established, until the beginning of the third millennium. In 2000, a report in the United States on oral health highlighted this gap and strongly recommended the integration of primary care and oral health care [6]. The separation of dentistry from medicine not only has had a significant impact on public health outcomes, but also has imposed many costs on the healthcare system [6]. Despite many shortcomings in teaching oral health care to medical students, effective steps have been taken. Interprofessional education has been encouraged and even obliged by the American Dental Educators Association (ADEA) and the American Medical Colleges Association (AAMC) [6].

Despite the trend of specialization in the last century, which brought some achievements, new challenges highlighted the need to reconsider interprofessional edu-

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cation. Previous studies have shown that the integration of oral health education into the medical curriculum is ultimately beneficial for promoting general health, especially among vulnerable groups, in addition to increasing students' awareness and information about oral health. Healthcare is absolutely an interprofessional field; the connection of different disciplines such as medicine and dentistry to each other can have synergistic effects on the outcomes of the healthcare system. Currently, there is an urgent need for pioneers whose vision is integrative care, and for whom oral hygiene is of paramount importance [6].

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this research.

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### Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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