

More Hong Kong dentists could help patients quit smoking, say HKU Faculty of Dentistry researchers

Not all dentists in Hong Kong proactively advise patients to give up smoking, but more dentists might do so if they had relevant local guidelines and practical training programmes, according to a questionnaire survey performed by a research team at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry.

Of the Hong Kong dentists replying to the researchers' questionnaire, only about a half said they routinely ask patients whether they smoke; but if any patients say they do, nearly all of these dentists then provide quitting advice. Less than a quarter of all respondents had received training on how to counsel patients to quit smoking, which, the researchers suggest, reflects the city's need for training activities and guidelines that are customised for dentists.

Given the documented evidence that health care professionals can increase the success rate of people's attempts to overcome tobacco addiction, the Faculty research team—including Associate Professor in Dental Public Health [Dr May CM Wong](#)—investigated local dentists' attitudes, experience, and clinical practices related to counselling patients on quitting smoking. The findings were published in December 2011 in the *Hong Kong Dental Journal*.

The team mailed a questionnaire in 2010 to a quarter of Hong Kong's 1935 registered dentists (every fourth name in the registry). Of the 211 dentists who replied, most were men (67%) and HKU dental graduates (62%).

Only 39% of the dentists reported feeling confident that their knowledge and skills were sufficient to help patients stop smoking, and 23% reported that they had received any type of relevant training, such as attending lectures or reading guidelines on promoting smoking cessation. A lack of patient motivation (86%), lack of consultation time (74%), and lack of smoking-cessation protocols and guidelines (68%) were the most commonly reported perceived barriers to providing advice on quitting smoking. The majority of respondents acknowledged a need for relevant guidelines specifically for dentists (76%) and said that such guidelines would help them when encountering patients who smoke (77%).

As for patient-dentist consultations, roughly a half (55%) of the respondents said they ask for and record their patients' smoking status. Of these 116 dentists, nearly all (96%) said they

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give quitting advice to patients who smoke, but less than a half (46%) ask whether their patients are actually willing to quit. Roughly a third reported handing out printed materials (37%), giving treatments and referrals (38%), or following up a patient's quitting progress (36%).

The results of statistical tests showed that dentists who were women, had graduated from HKU, or had undergone training on counselling smokers were more likely than others to ask patients whether they smoke (odds ratios of 3.5, 3.6, and 7.3, respectively).

Despite the low questionnaire response rate of 50%, the study findings indicate that dentists working in Hong Kong do not “actively” conduct smoking-cessation counselling, the researchers conclude. They recommend that guidelines on helping patients stop smoking be developed for local dentists and then promoted through “strategies such as educational outreach visits” to clinics. Practical training, they add, could be included in both the HKU undergraduate dental curriculum and in postgraduate continuing education programmes—especially for dentists who are men or whose dental training was received outside Hong Kong.

In the current absence of Hong Kong guidelines for dentists, the authors point to some existing counselling resources that could be promoted among local dentists, such as the following:

- Website of the Tobacco Control Resource Centre of the HKSAR Government Department of Health's Tobacco Control Office: http://www.tco.gov.hk/english/health/health_tcrc.html including “Smoking cessation information kit” (2009): http://www.tco.gov.hk/english/downloads/files/kit09_eng.pdf
- National Health Service, UK Government Department of Health, “Smokefree and smiling: helping dental patients to quit tobacco (smoking cessation guidance for primary care dental teams)” (2007): http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_074972.pdf
- Public Health Service, US Government Department of Health and Human Services, “Clinical practice guideline: Treating tobacco use and dependence” (2000): http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating_tobacco_use.pdf

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Source: Lu HX, Wong MCM, Chan KF, Chan TK, Chung WY, Leung MY, Mak YK, Pu YC, Wong SSS, Wong WY, Yeung HW. Perspectives of the dentists on smoking cessation in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Dent J 2011;8:79-86. Journal link: http://www.hkda.org/hkdj/V8/N2/v8n2_p79_OA2.pdf

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