

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Referral Practice of Periodontics among General Dentists

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Periodontal disease is a common disease worldwide. The type of treatment of periodontal disease depends on the diagnosis. The treatment plan should also focus on managing the risk factors and modifying factors which affect the periodontal disease and treatment.

**Aims and Objectives:** This study, by the means of a questionnaire, aims to identify the referral relationship between general dentists and periodontists and awareness of advanced periodontal therapy among general dentists in Bellary city, Karnataka, India.

**Materials and Methods:** The study was carried out in the form of a survey among 150 general dental practitioners (general practitioners) having their dental clinics in and around Bellary city. A questionnaire comprising 10 questions with subquestions was prepared.

**Results:** It was observed that 84% of private practitioners referred patients to periodontists, of which majority had clinic for more than 10 years.

**Conclusions:** The general dentist is the professional who knows the patient best and must take the lead in developing the treatment plan and its sequence and coordination. He should utilize the clinical skills of the specialist(s) and his area of expertise and then manage the continuing care of the patient.

**Keywords:** General dentists, Periodontics, Referral Practice

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## INTRODUCTION

Periodontal disease is a common disease worldwide. The type of treatment of periodontal disease depends on the diagnosis. The treatment plan should also focus on managing the risk factors and modifying factors which affect the periodontal disease and treatment. Untreated periodontal infections can adversely affect general health, and other diseases can contribute to periodontal pathogenesis.<sup>[1-3]</sup> Furthermore, untreated periodontitis may be a risk factor for myocardial infarction, non-hemorrhagic strokes, and adverse birth outcomes. The advancements have given a success predictability level to periodontal diagnosis and treatment plan. The level of specialty education is limited for undergraduates.<sup>[4,5]</sup> Therefore, dentists should know how to make timely and appropriate referrals to periodontists when required. This study, by the means of a questionnaire, aims to identify the referral relationship between general dentists and periodontists and awareness of advanced periodontal therapy among general dentists in Bellary city, Karnataka, India.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the form of a survey among 150 general dental practitioners (general practitioners [GPs]) having their dental clinics in and around Bellary city. A questionnaire comprising 10 questions with subquestions was prepared. Dental practitioners with a dental clinic in an urban area, non-academicians, qualification of bachelor of dental surgery only, and experience of at least 1 year in the private clinical setup were included in the study. Interns, dental students, dentists exclusively working in a dental institute, and dentists with the qualification of master of dental surgery were excluded from the study. The questionnaire was distributed to each of them by visiting their clinic.

## Statistical Analysis

For each question, independent percentage was calculated to determine the frequency of the responses.

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To identify the variable factor affecting the responses, multivariate logistic regression analysis test was used.

## RESULTS

Of 150 dentists included, the average years of experience were 6.5 years. The results revealed that 86% of the GPs performed Phase-1 therapy on their own. Our survey indicates that the role of a periodontist in private dental clinics in Bellary is chiefly limited to surgical therapy. It was observed that 84% of private practitioners referred patients to periodontists, of which majority had clinic for more than 10 years [Table 1]. Almost half of the GPs referred patients to periodontists for procedures such as flap surgery, ridge augmentation, and implants. Another interesting response to be noted is that majority of dentists (75%) referred patients to a periodontist for the chief complaint of mobile teeth. About 62% of the dentists recalled patients after 3 months of surgical treatment. Although the recall was made after 3 months, many dentists commented that patient's compliance was a problem. About 69% of GPs have attended <5 continuing dental education programs in the past 1 year. The results of the study showed that 74.8% of GPs referred flap surgery cases to specialist. About 60% of practitioners referred ridge augmentation and implant cases to specialist.

## DISCUSSION

Interdisciplinary treatment in dentistry creates a triad made up of the referral doctor, referral patient, and the specialist. The value of this coordinated diagnosis and treatment approach is for everyone in the triangle to win. The success of this triad depends on teamwork, mutual understanding, and respect among the team members. Mutual acceptance by the general dentist and specialist as professional peers, subject to each other's critical professional evaluation with a teamwork is essential for any interdisciplinary referral.<sup>[6,7]</sup> The referral procedure in periodontal treatments involves the mutual care and treatment of the same patient shared between the referring doctor and the periodontists to whom the patient has been referred. The results of our study showed that 84% of dentists referred patients to a specialist. Many factors such as clinical, personal, and cost influence the decision to refer a patient to a specialist. This makes the referral process a complex entity in the everyday practice of dentistry.<sup>[8,9]</sup> The specialty of periodontology is evolving in all aspects ranging from newer advances in diagnosis to the use of growth factors and regenerative techniques in treatment. These evidence-based advances have given periodontal diagnosis and treatment a higher level of predictability of success. It is a known fact that the perceptions and beliefs about the responsibilities of the dental professional, as

**Table 1:** Referral of patients to periodontist by private practitioner

Referral to periodontist	%
Yes	84
No	16

well as knowledge of resources and available support services, form the cornerstone of any dental practice.<sup>[10]</sup> Studies should be performed in the future to get an overall perception of the general dentists toward periodontal treatment in India. Such studies performed at different intervals of time in the same cities can also provide an idea about the changing trends and pattern of dental treatment performed by the general dental practitioners.

## CONCLUSIONS

Teamwork and leadership are essential in the successful interdisciplinary referral. The general dentist, however, is the professional who knows the patient best and must take the lead in developing the treatment plan and its sequence and coordination. He should utilize the clinical skills of the specialist(s) and his area of expertise and then manage the continuing care of the patient.

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