

**Knowledge and awareness of Oral Medicine specialty among the medical practitioners in
Lata Mangeshkar Hospital, Nagpur**

Abstract

Background: Medicine and dentistry need to go hand in hand for holistic betterment of a patient. However, in India even today the medical practitioners are unaware of a very important specialty of dentistry which is Oral Medicine and Radiology which deals with oral manifestations of systemic diseases. **Aim:** Therefore, this study was conducted to assess and increase their awareness. **Study design:** A validated questionnaire consisting of closed ended questions was sent to 100 medical practitioners and they were asked to tick the most appropriate response. **Results:** Among the 100 doctors, 55% were aware of the specialty and the remaining 45% were not aware of the specialty in dentistry. It was also observed that even though the medical practitioners encountered oral medicine specialty cases like Temporo-mandibular joint disorders, orofacial pain, premalignant lesion etc. they referred them elsewhere due to lack of awareness. **Conclusion:** There is a pressing the need to improve the coordination between medical and dental practitioners.

Keywords- Oral medicine and radiology, medical practitioners, awareness, Temporo-mandibular joint disorders, orofacial pain, , premalignant lesions.

BACKGROUND:

Oral and maxillofacial disorders and lesions are widely prevalent, yet they are preventable. Most of these have an insidious onset and are chronic and asymptomatic until they have reached an advanced stage. Also, there are several systemic diseases with oral manifestations, many of which manifest earlier than their systemic counterparts. This makes routine oral examination extremely viable for the early detection and the treatment of a number of oral and non-oral diseases.

The first contact for most of the patients is usually with a general medical practitioner. Inspection of the oral cavity by a doctor has been accepted as a part of routine physical examination and if it is done on a routine basis, it can considerably reduce the morbidity and mortality which results from oral diseases ⁽¹⁾.

A large number of systemic disorders are interrelated with oral and maxillofacial diseases. A representative model for such a substantial overlap between medicine and dentistry can be found in Oral Medicine and Radiology specialty of dentistry. In the realm of dental health education, Oral medicine and radiology started off separately and were recognized by the Dental Council of India in 1968 as Oral Medicine and 1971 as Oral Radiology in 1980s, this subject merged and was designated as Oral Medicine and Radiology ⁽²⁾. It focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of oral mucosal lesions, treatment of medically compromised dental patients and dental and maxillofacial imaging ⁽³⁾.

People in today's world are more health conscious and are aware of the of the different medical specialties. Despite the tremendous advancements in the field of dentistry, there seems to be limited knowledge among the general public and also among medical professionals regarding areas of specialization in dentistry⁽⁴⁾. Studies have shown that awareness about this specialization of dentistry among the public and medical fraternity in India is very low. ⁽⁵⁾Therefore, this study was aimed at assessing the knowledge and awareness of Oral Medicine specialty among the medical practitioners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among the medical practitioners who had optimal flow of outpatients and inpatients in Lata Mangeshkar hospital, Nagpur. A validated questionnaire consisting of closed ended questions was used for the study. The survey was conducted via google forms. Questionnaire containing demographic details and specially framed 5 questions in English language were given to the doctors. The link of the forms was sent to a sample of 100 practitioners by email. The respondents were asked to fill the most appropriate answer from the given options. Results were tabulated using google forms, Microsoft excel and frequency tabulation was done.

RESULTS:

The sample consisted of 100 doctors with an MBBS qualification, who have had adequate exposure of patients on a day to day basis. Among the 100 doctors, 55% were aware of the specialty and the remaining 45% were not aware of the specialty in dentistry. The awareness levels of oral medicine specialty among medical practitioners are shown in Figure 1.

Among 100 doctors questioned, 20% reported frequent incidence, 54% reported occasional incidence, and 26% reported rare incidence of oral manifestations of systemic diseases in their practice. The incidence of oral medicine specialty cases among the medical practitioners in their routine day-to-day practice is shown in figure 2. It was observed that, 17% reported frequent incidence, 56% reported occasional incidence, and 27% reported rare incidence of facial and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) pain. Figure 2 also shows the incidence of various Oral and Maxillofacial diseases encountered by medical practitioners. Of all the subjects interviewed, 27% reported frequent, 47% reported occasional, and 26% reported rare incidence of oral mucosal lesions in their practice. Of the total number of subjects interviewed, 17% reported frequent, 50% reported occasional and 33% reported rare incidence of salivary gland disorders in their routine practice. Among the 100 doctors, 20% reported frequent incidence, 54% reported occasional incidence, and 26% reported rare incidence of oral manifestations of systemic diseases in their practice. Out of the 100 doctors questioned, 7% referred their patients with facial trauma to department of Oral and Maxillofacial surgery, 65% to general medicine, 13% to Oral Medicine and radiology, 4% to ENT, 9% to general dentist, 1% to general surgery and 1% to dermatologist. Figure 3 shows the specialty to which the medical practitioners refer cases with different oral conditions. The doctors referred 7% of their patients with oral manifestations of systemic diseases to department of Oral and Maxillofacial surgery, 13% to general medicine, 9% to Oral Medicine and radiology, 9% to ENT, 18% to general dentist, 19% to general surgery, 3% to neurologist, 21% to orthopaedic and 1% to Orthodontist. The doctors referred 5% of their patients with oral mucosal lesions to department of Oral and Maxillofacial surgery, 42% to general medicine, 17% to Oral Medicine and radiology, 9% to ENT, 18% to general dentist, 8% to dermatologist and 1% to general surgery. Out of the 100 doctors, 5% referred their patients

with salivary gland disorders to Oral and Maxillofacial surgery, 18% to general medicine, 5% to Oral Medicine and radiology, 8% to ENT, 13% to general dentist, and 51% to general surgery.

DISCUSSIONS:

As William Osler said, "Mouth is the mirror of general health."⁽¹⁾ Diseased oral conditions may adversely affect general health.^(1,6) The dental and the medical practitioners together form a vital part of a complete healthcare system and as a consequence, the knowledge among the medical practitioners about the various specializations of dentistry are quite low.⁽¹⁾ For many doctors oral health may be thought of as a specialty that is the domain of the dentist⁽⁷⁾. Results of the study show that a fair number of patients with oral diseases visit the medical practitioners and majority of them refer these patients to a general practitioner or a general surgeon instead of any dental specialty. Thus, physicians could play a pivotal role in oral public health⁽⁸⁾.

The study was carried out to assess the awareness of the medical practitioners about the dental specialty of Oral medicine. The study also shows that a fair number of people are referred to general physicians and general surgeons instead of a to a dentist.

A study performed by Vijay Kumar Bokkasam et al in Tirupati city to examine the level of awareness about Oral medicine specialty among the medical practitioners, showed that only 39% of the doctors were aware about the specialty of Oral medicine⁽¹⁾ while the study conducted by us shows that 55% of the doctors were aware about this field.

The results of our study showed that 56%, 47%, 50% and 54% of the doctors reported occasional incidences of TMJ pain, oral mucosal lesions, salivary gland disorders and oral manifestations of

systemic diseases. respectively whereas the study conducted by Bokkasam et al showed 44% reported frequent incidence, 48% reported occasional incidence of TMJ pain, 44% reported occasional incidence of oral mucosal lesions and 43% reported rare incidence of salivary gland disorders in their practice.⁽¹⁾

As shown in the above results, most of the practitioners refer their patients to general physician, some refer their patients to general surgeon and very few refer their patients to a general dentist while the study conducted by Bokkasam et al show that most the doctors refer to a general dentist, some refer to general surgeon and few refer to a general physician.⁽¹⁾

This shows that even though the number of patients reporting with oral diseases to medical practitioners is quite high, the awareness about the specialty of Oral medicine is still among the medical practitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Some of the strategies that can be employed to improve the current situation of awareness levels on oral medicine specialty are to make effective efforts to:

- Combine continuing medical education (CME) and continuing dental education (CDE) programs,
- Publish articles in medical journal,
- Conduct combined conferences at national and international levels,
- Create an association by combining relevant dental and medical specialties,
- Circulate combined newsletters and,

- Conduct similar surveys and awareness programs at the national level.

CONCLUSION:

Even though a need is felt, on account of less availability and poor awareness of the expertise, lesser referrals are made to oral physicians. These findings emphasize the need to improve the coordination between medical and dental practitioners. It also indicates the need to improve the general awareness regarding the expertise of specialists in Oral Medicine and Radiology.

Some of the strategies that can be employed to improve the current situation are to make effective efforts for campaigns, to educate the healthcare consumers and providers. There is also a need to publicize the specialty of dentistry in general and Oral Medicine and Radiology in particular.

This can probably be done by arranging more inter disciplinary sessions and interdepartmental discussions, to improve the awareness of our medical colleagues.

Consent & Ethical Approval:

As per international standard or university standard guideline participant consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

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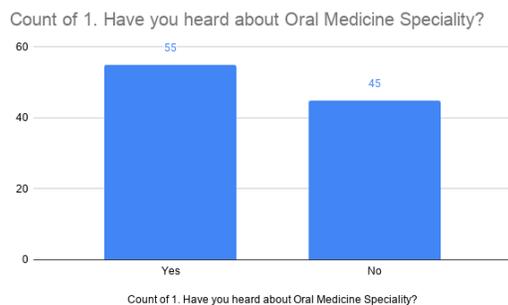


Figure 1: The awareness levels of oral medicine specialty among medical practitioners

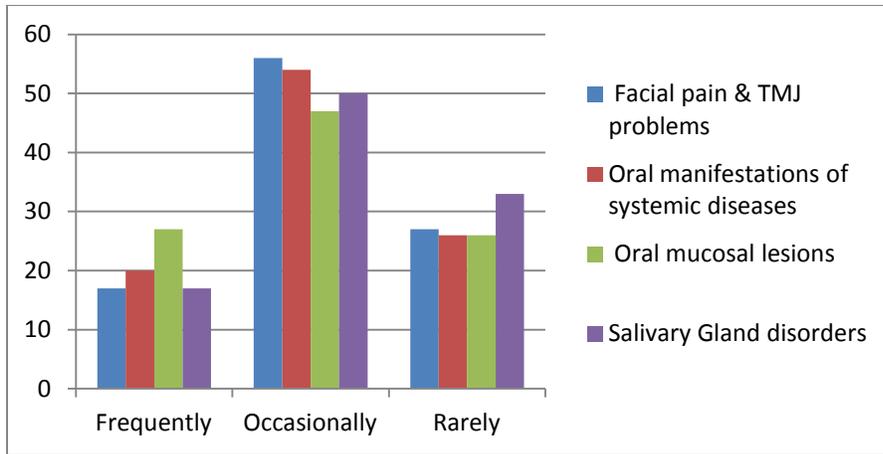


Figure 2: The incidence of oral medicine specialty cases among the medical practitioners in their routine day-to-day practice

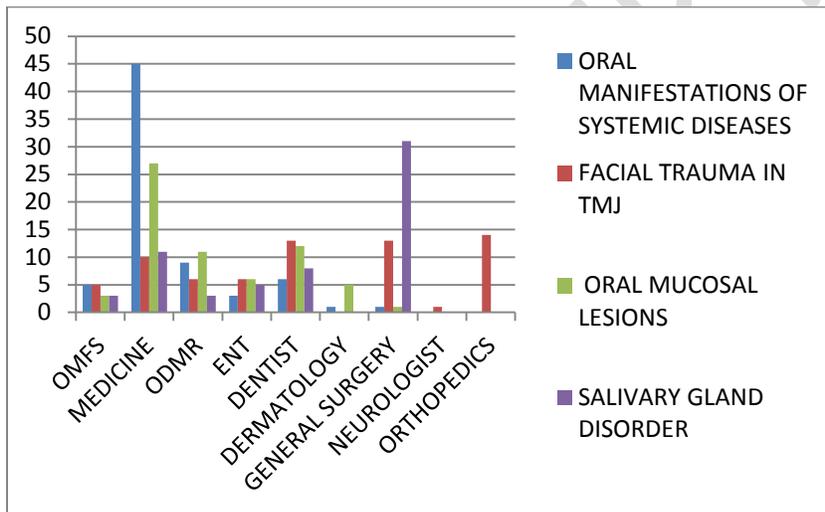


Figure 3: specialty to which the medical practitioners refer cases with different oral conditions.