

Do We Recognize a Prosthodontist? A Questionnaire-Based Survey

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Abstract

Loss of teeth impairs oral functions and masticatory efficiency and has a psychological impact on the patient. Not only missing teeth but also any defects of the face have important psychosocial implications for affected patients. Face has a unique role in social and emotional expression and communication, and most importantly, it is the reflection of oneself. Maxillofacial defects are deformities that affect an individual's physical and psychological health, resulting in serious psychiatric, familial, and social problems. In the earlier days, it was difficult to rehabilitate these patients on a consistent basis. Today, with the emergence of maxillofacial prosthodontics as a field, it is possible to restore the majority of them to normal form and function. The vista of prosthodontics is wide and encompasses various treatment modalities right from a simple conventional complete denture to advanced implant-supported and reconstructive procedures in all age groups right from infancy to geriatrics. A common man must be aware of the reach of a prosthodontist in terms of rehabilitation, as well as it is the responsibility of a clinician to consult a prosthodontist as per case demands. This questionnaire-based survey is to know the need, knowledge, awareness, attitude, and desire to consult a prosthodontist among the general public and general practitioners.

Keywords: Awareness survey, Prosthodontist, Education, General public, General practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Teeth play a key role in the general wellness of an individual. Loss of teeth significantly impairs oral functions and masticatory efficiency and has a psychological impact on the patient. Rehabilitation of the patient is of utmost importance to improve their quality of life.

Not only missing teeth but also any defects of the face and associated structures, therefore, have important psychosocial implications on affected patients. Here a prosthodontist plays a crucial role. A prosthodontist is a specialist who deals with the replacement of missing teeth and oral structures, dentures, or prostheses. The vista of prosthodontics is wide and encompasses various treatment modalities right from a simple conventional complete denture to advanced implant-supported prosthesis and reconstructive procedures in all age groups right from infancy to geriatrics.^[1-3]

Patients with different educational and socioeconomic background may have varied awareness regarding the role and scope of a prosthodontist. As it is rightly said, awareness allows us to get outside of our mind and observe it in action. It is the greatest agent of change and is important in each and every element of life.

With emphasis being placed on patient-mediated concerns in prosthetic treatment planning, understanding patient's knowledge and attitude toward the various prosthetic treatments and creating awareness among the general public could be a prospective tool in predicting successful treatment outcomes. Shreya Gupta, Sneha Mantri, and Abhilasha Bhasin had evaluated the knowledge and attitude of the general public toward the prosthodontic rehabilitation and utilization of dental services and concluded that 44% of the surveyed population had insufficient knowledge regarding the treatment options for missing teeth.^[2,4-7]

Thus, the purpose of this study is to survey the need, knowledge, awareness, attitude, and desire to consult a prosthodontist among the general practitioners and general public.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study setting

This study was a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey conducted all over India.

A questionnaire with 33 QUESTIONS, 15 dedicated to the general practitioners and 18 dedicated to the General Public, was prepared and validated to analyze the awareness and knowledge of prosthodontists among the general practitioners and general public of India. The online survey was conducted through Google Forms.

Study subjects

This study was 202 dental practitioners and 240 general public participated in this survey.

Methodology

In this study of a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey, the targeted population were dentists (general dentist and specialist/consultant) and general public of India.

A survey through a online standard questionnaire with 38 questions, open as well as multiple-choice were questions delivered to dental practitioners and general public, out of which 15 questions for the dental practitioner and 18 questions for the general public. Questionnaire was formulated in Marathi, Hindi, and English language. The questionnaire comprised questions to assess awareness, knowledge, and significance of a prosthodontist among the general dental practitioners and general public of India. Adequate time was provided to fill the questionnaire.

The survey consisted of two different questionnaires with dedicated questions for general practitioners and general public. Collected data were tallied and sent for statistical treatment.

RESULTS

A total of 440 participants responded out of which 202 were dental practitioners and 238 general public. The results of the very important and relevant questions of the survey are given in the following frequency tables.

Table 1: Do you know about prosthodontics as a specialty of dentistry?

	Frequency	Percent
No	60	25.1
Yes	179	74.9
Total	239	100.0

Table 2: Whom would you like your treatment to be done by?

	Frequency	Percent
General practitioner	52	21.8
Someone who is specialized in the field	187	78.2
Total	239	100.0

Table 3: Do you know there are fixed treatment options for replacing

	Frequency	Percent
All missing teeth	1	0.4
Multiple missing teeth	59	24.7
Multiple missing teeth; all missing teeth	53	22.2
Single missing teeth	7	2.9
Single missing teeth; all missing teeth	40	16.7
Single missing teeth; multiple missing teeth	9	3.8
Single missing teeth; multiple missing teeth; all missing teeth	10	4.2
Single missing teeth; multiple missing teeth; all missing teeth	60	25.1
Total	239	100.0

Table 4: Are you aware that a missing eye/ear/nose/digits can be replaced?

	Frequency	Percent
No	119	49.8
Yes	120	50.2
Total	239	100.0

Responses given by dental practitioner

In this study, the level of knowledge, awareness, and attitude about prosthetic treatment modalities has been evaluated. Prosthodontists usually consider factors such as the preservation of natural teeth and the maintenance of periodontal health as a priority, but patients tend to prioritize comfort in mastication and improvement of esthetics.^[3] Therefore, it is vital to investigate patients' awareness, need, and demand for prosthodontic treatment options. To the best of our knowledge, ours could be the first Indian study that assessed those variables on prosthodontic options among general public and general dentist.

From the present study, it can be observed that the subjects were aware of various types of prostheses; this may be due to the increase in technology and media. However, the awareness about maxillofacial prosthesis and cleft lip and palate is less; this may be as the subject did not seem to the need replacement

Table 5: Would you be interested in an awareness program for more knowledge on different treatment options available for replacing missing teeth and parts of head, face, neck, digits, etc?

	Frequency	Percent
No	55	23.0
Yes	183	76.6
Yes; No	1	0.4
Total	239	100.0

Table 6: Do you feel the need to consult a prosthodontist?

	Frequency	Percent
No	39	19.3
Yes	163	80.7
Total	202	100.0

Table 7: Since how many years are you practicing dentistry?

	Frequency	Percent
<5 years	129	63.9
>15 years	5	2.5
10-15 years	18	8.9
5 to 10 years	50	24.8
Total	202	100.0

Table 8: Do you consult a Prosthodontist for implants Prosthetic rehabilitation?

	Frequency	Percent
No	67	33.2
Yes	135	66.8
Total	202	100.0

of maxillofacial structures. The study suggests that in general, the dentist must spend more time on the chair side during examination and inform the patient about all the different types of prosthesis that a dentist can fabricate. Even though there is a scarcity of data regarding patient's needs and preferences in the field of prosthodontics, this study shows an increase in demand for fixed partial dentures by the individual with knowledge of the same. From the present study, it can be observed that most of the subjects were not aware of maxillofacial prosthesis.^[4,5,8,9] This implies that persons whether male or female need motivation and education to help them know about various types of prostheses that they can get fabricated for themselves.

DISCUSSION

Literature is replete with the fact that the importance of teeth for the general health and well-being of an individual is of paramount importance. The role of teeth in speech, mastication,

Table 9: If No, whom do you consult for implant placement and rehabilitation?

	Frequency	Percent
	42	20.8
Oral surgeon	24	11.9
Periodontist	19	9.4
Prosthodontist	117	57.9
Total	202	100.0

Table 10: Are you aware of different treatment modalities in maxillofacial prosthodontics?

	Frequency	Percent
No	56	27.7
Yes	146	72.3
Total	202	100.0

Table 11: Do you consult a prosthodontist when you are approached by a patient requiring rehabilitation of the defects resulting due to maxillofacial carcinoma/trauma?

	Frequency	Percent
Before surgery	150	74.3
Nil	10	5.0
Post surgery	42	20.8
Total	202	100.0

and deglutition is irreplaceable. Hence, an appreciation of the need for the replacement of lost teeth which depend on knowledge and attitude of the individual about types and modes of artificial teeth replacement as well as the significance of a prosthodontist is required to be known. Hence, this study was conducted to evaluate the awareness, knowledge, and significance of a prosthodontist among the general dental practitioners and general public of India.

In this study, a total of 33 questions, 15 to the general practitioners and 18 to the general public, were prepared and validated to analyze the awareness and knowledge of the prosthodontists among the general practitioners and general public pan India. The online survey was conducted through Google Forms.

Various questions regarding the awareness of the different treatment modalities a prosthodontist encompass and, at the same time, the knowledge of the need of prosthodontist was asked to the general public and the general practitioners. Among the practitioners, it was observed that even though 80% of the general practitioners felt the need to consult a prosthodontist, only 45.7% of the practitioners did regularly consult a prosthodontist. Furthermore, the knowledge regarding different non-conventional treatment options was poor among the general practitioners. This showed the need of creating more awareness among the general practitioners for the vista of prosthodontics.^[10-14]

On the contrary, the survey among the general public revealed that only 54.8% of them knew prosthodontics as a specialty. Furthermore, the awareness among the general public regarding the different arenas in prosthodontics was below average. The knowledge regarding the different fixed as well removable options to replace a missing tooth or teeth was found to be as low as 40%. A similar finding was found in a study conducted by Nadgere *et al.* who evaluated the prosthetic status and the prosthetic need of the people in Navi Mumbai. She concluded that as much as 85% of population were without any prosthesis.^[6] About 60% of the general public were not aware that a missing eye, nose, ear, etc., can be replaced and rehabilitated by a prosthodontist. This was in line with the study conducted by Dahane *et al.* in 2021. They conducted a study wherein they evaluated the awareness and knowledge regarding maxillofacial prosthodontics among medical practitioners and concluded that only 10.9% were aware of maxillofacial prosthodontics as a branch of dentistry which deals with the restoration of maxillofacial defects.^[15-18]

Only 38.9% of the population knew about geriatrics as a branch of prosthodontics and how it helps in treating the elderly. The importance of a prosthodontist in the rehabilitation of a patient suffering from mucormycosis post-COVID is still not known by many. The awareness and knowledge regarding this was found to be as low as 39.7% among the general public. This shows that there is a highly unmet need regarding the awareness and knowledge of the population of who a prosthodontist is and the need for prosthodontics.

In our survey, it was also noticed that 64% of the general population used social media platform for gaining knowledge and solutions regarding dental problems. Furthermore, social media advertising influenced 63.5% of the general population in selecting their treatment options. This clearly showed how social media played a role in motivating and educating the general public and influenced their treatment options. Lack of awareness of various prosthodontic treatment options among patients prevented them from utilizing treatment. Social media platforms, dental camps, and prosthodontic outreach programs are possible solutions to change the attitude, to spread awareness, and to provide knowledge about ways and means of artificial teeth replacement as concluded in our survey were similar to the study conducted by Gupta *et al.*^[18-24]

CONCLUSION

Within the limitations of this survey, it can be concluded that the dentist should educate the patient about the different treatment options available in prosthodontic rehabilitation. The majority of the population was not aware of the missing parts of the face which could be prosthetically replaced, role of prosthodontist in head and neck cancer, and significance of geriatric dentistry. Knowledge about prosthodontics as a specialty was below average among general public. Awareness camps can be conducted to educate people on the type of replacement of teeth and maxillofacial structures that they can

opt for. However, to further enhance the proficiency, efforts should be made to encourage the general public to be aware of the prosthodontic practice through continuous education programs. The prosthetic needs of the study population must be given high priority as there are many unmet needs and awareness. The focus of the dental outreach camps conducted should be oriented toward understanding the needs of the patients, their preferences and on improving the awareness and knowledge that they have about dental prosthesis. Furthermore, the awareness regarding multidisciplinary team approach involving the role of a prosthodontist along with other specialties should be encouraged among the general practitioners.

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