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*Shenuka Singh*

*University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa*

## **What role does the dental curriculum play in shaping undergraduate student's attitudes towards oral health self-care practices?: A report from a South African University**

**Introduction:** Student attitudes and behavior towards their own oral health status could reflect their understanding of the importance of oral health promotive activities.

**Study Objectives:** This exploratory study with a qualitative approach was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which the undergraduate curriculum could act as an enabler for student oral health self-care practices.

**Methods:** Data collection comprised document analysis (targeted curriculum review) and in-depth face-to-face interviews with undergraduate dental therapy and oral health students, and academic staff at a university in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Ten students volunteered to participate in the study while five academic staff were purposively selected. A separate interview schedule was developed for students and staff, respectively. The emergent themes from document analysis were compared to the analyzed data from the interviews.

**Results:** The curriculum was underpinned by a strong foundation in prevention, and there was the consensus among respondents that the curriculum met the needs for undergraduate training in preventive dentistry. The following themes emerged from data analysis: curriculum support for self-care practices; depth and scope of clinical training; the role of clinical supervisors and challenges in clinical training. Respondents agreed that the curriculum could influence students' attitudes towards self-care practices such as tooth brushing and flossing but that academic responsibilities and clinical contact time placed constraints on these practices.

**Conclusion:** The undergraduate curriculum does provide support for enabling student knowledge acquisition and positive attitudes, but more effort is required to enable oral health behavioral modifications among students.

### **Biography**

Shenuka Singh is an Associate Professor in the Discipline of Dentistry at UKZN. She has a doctoral degree (PhD) in Dental Public Health. She is currently supervising 16 postgraduate students. She chairs the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and is a member of the Biomedical Research Ethics Committee at UKZN. In addition, she is Research Ethics Chair for the Council for Science and Industry Research in South Africa. She is also appointed as a member of the National Health Research Ethics Council in South Africa (2016-2019).

singhshen@ukzn.ac.za

### **Notes:**