

Awareness and practice of ergonomics by dental students in clinical years

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In this study, posture, musculoskeletal disorders and work place layout were investigated under physical ergonomics in a group of dental students, because dentists and dental students usually use fixed, non-flexible postures and narrow work areas for prolonged periods when assessing and treating patients.

The main tool of this descriptive, qualitative and cross-sectional study was a questionnaire. This study was done among 201 third year and fourth year dental students who were in their clinical practice (30 subjects for pilot study and 171 subjects for original study). Pilot study gathered data on reliability of the questionnaire and necessary adjustment to the final version were made according to the findings. The questionnaire evaluated the presence of pain, areas of body affected by pain, awareness regarding correct postures, work environment, about ergonomics, and preventive measures. The data were analyzed using categorical statistical analysis methods using SPSS 16.0 software, and 95% confidence interval levels were used to describe the findings.

The results of this study indicated that the awareness of ergonomics among dental students was satisfactory, although 96.2% did not know the term 'ergonomics'. Only 5.6% of students reportedly performed stretching exercises after clinical procedures. Students who were in clinical practice the longest (2009/2010 batch) had the most complaints (76.1%) of pain after clinical practice, while the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 batches complained 54.5% and 72.7% pain respectively. The body areas that most students complained of pain were neck (22.9%), middle back (22.9%) and lower back (22.6%). Periodontal treatment was the procedure that most students (54.3 %) complained to be associated with pain.

The conclusion of the study was that the awareness of ergonomic practices among third year and fourth year dental students was satisfactory. Most of the students did not know the term 'ergonomics' even though they followed good ergonomic practices. The body areas that most students complained of pain were neck, middle back and lower back. The group of students who had been engaged in clinical practice the longest experienced most of pain after clinical practice. Most students reported periodontal treatment as the procedure associated with most pain.