

STUDENTS

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Dear fellow colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen, it was fantastic to witness a very positive response to our first edition of DentaltownUK, which featured some incredible content from many of the top figures in UK dentistry.

It also showcased the great work done by Zain Hameed and Awais Ali, fourth year dental students at King's College London.

DentaltownUK includes a student section because we truly believe that it is important for the future generation of the profession to share ideas and opinions with their more experienced colleagues.

It also provides an excellent opportunity to understand the importance of a work/life balance whilst embarking on a dental educational programme, and discuss food, hobbies, style, travel and student experiences that can happen outside the clinical and learning environment.

This month, the student section features the incredible work of Lawrence Sharkey, a dental student who shares my passion for the performing arts, and who has developed himself in musical theatre in particular.

It also showcases the 'elective down under' that Ajay Mehta has been on and how he discovered the concept of Myobrace, an alternative orthodontic treatment modality that aims to use myofunctional orthodontic techniques to correct malocclusions.

In addition, Sahil Sharma, a student who is involved heavily in dance, shares his article on how we can reduce our levels of stress. In addition, Aditi Goel, also shares her understanding of the concept of stress, and makes her personal recommendations for how

dental students can reduce the level of stress they experience.

Stress management is a component of dentistry that we can't master from our books or our lectures. We'll have to learn and adapt with time and experience, but this article points out important aspects to keep in mind.

Modern dentistry demands that high levels of quality work be done in a short amount of time. Your patients, colleagues and clinical treatment must also be managed effectively.

All of these factors can add to your stress load. Many dentists and students that I speak to report: feeling inadequate for the task, boredom, a need to develop extreme attention to detail and the continuous striving for absolutely perfect restorations, and challenges regarding treating patients who are anxious.

Challenges regarding developing professional relationships between team members and fighting off eyestrain, back and neck problems also create important considerations for dental students.

However, stress is not always a bad thing. Small amounts of stress are great efficiency boosters, which increase performance. However, surplus amounts can have dangerous effects on health.

I am sure that you will enjoy this edition of DentaltownUK; it's packed with some great content from very special individuals in the profession. Please do engage with our message boards and let us know about your thoughts. ■

WHAT IS STRESS AND WHAT ARE ITS CAUSES?

Stress. A word that has become extremely over used in the last couple of decades. Why is this person angry? Must be stressed. Why are they upset? Must be stress. What's wrong? "Not much, just stressed".

The word is so overused now that defining stress is becoming harder and harder everyday. Being a dental student, I come across this word several times a week in many contexts used by other students, colleagues, tutors and even patients and yet if someone asked me why I was stressed, I probably wouldn't be able to give a sole reason that could justify the use of such a serious term.

Hans Selye initially penned stress as 'a non specific response of the body to any demand for change' in 1936 and since then the definition has changed in many respects.

A more commonly accepted definition now is 'a physical, mental or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension'. Stress can present itself in many different ways and it is the way in which an individual deals with this that impacts how much it effects that individual normal life.

The aetiology of stress is multifactorial, it is not necessary that one sole reason should stress a person out and therefore with dental students at university who have to deal with the stress of patient appointments, quota's, professional expectations as well as managing lectures and exams, it isn't surprising the number of students who are stressed is on an increase every year.

For students before clinical training starts, it was found that exams and fear of failing was what caused the most stress whilst for those who had started clinical training, the biggest





STRESS, WHAT EXACTLY IS IT AND HOW DO WE MANAGE IT?

ADITI GOEL, 4th Year Undergraduate Student (BDS) King's College London

stimuli were quota's and meeting requirements. It was also shown that female students were more stressed than male students (Rosli. T.E et al. 2005)¹. But why is it that dental students perceive more stress? One argument that could be put forward is that actually getting on to a BDS course means you've been one of the best of not the best in your previous school life.

Owing to a life of over achieving for such a long period of time, once put in a group with everyone who is the same, academic success is considered the norm and it is perceived that there is now even a need for clinical competence to be achieved at the same time.

This transition from a school student to a dental student can impact the academic achievement and psychological health of many students (Sanders, A. E. et al. 1999)². However, then the question arises of whether stress is an acquired response once students start on the dental course or whether the course is just an accelerator of a mental illness that was already present in the students before inclusion in the course.

The answer to this is unknown and needs for further research to take place. The causes for stress are infinite and a leading topic of conversation now is not why are we stressed but rather how do we manage it?

MANAGING STRESS

Managing Stress is seen as a subject diverse in itself. From simple practices such as time management to the limited knowledge of techniques such as yoga and acupuncture, almost every method in the book has been recommended to me and I'm sure my colleagues in terms of how to stop stress getting the better of you! The most common and easily applicable include:

Time Management- Don't leave things to the

last minute. Just because you're a dental student, doesn't mean you shouldn't be able to enjoy social activities like other students on different courses. All it takes is a bit of pre- planning and organization. Timetable enough time for both work and play and use allocated slots efficiently.

Organization- again this refers back to pre planning. Read up on your appointment cases before going in to the clinic. This not only prevents the additional stress of not knowing what's going on but also instills patient confidence as they recognize your abilities.

Relievers- always know what relieves you from stress! This could be as simple as listening to music, going for a walk or playing a sport. Anytime you feel a stress headache coming on, take a break and refresh your mind.

Sleep and good meals- As students, these are the two things we either miss out on completely or over dose on but balance is key. A healthy sleep pattern and regular, healthy meals help to maintain good bodily function and also prevent hormone misbalance. Lack of both accelerate bodily stress and it is likely to be reflected in your attitude and work so avoid stress build up in the first place.

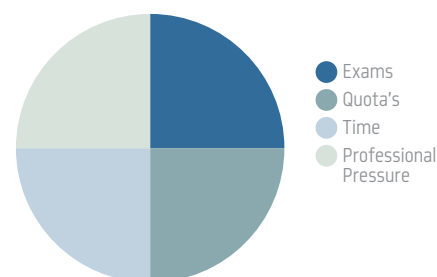
Network- one of the best things about being a dental student is that, not only do you meet so many different people but you also meet so many like-minded people. Use this to your advantage and connect with people. Have study/revision sessions, talk about what is stressing you out- it's not necessary that only you can solve the reason for your stress. Use all the available sources to you- friends, course mates, tutors, well-being societies; all these can help!

Take control- don't ignore stress! Though common, ignoring it won't help anyone. Either it will keep building up or the problem will become a bigger issue than it is. Actively targeting the

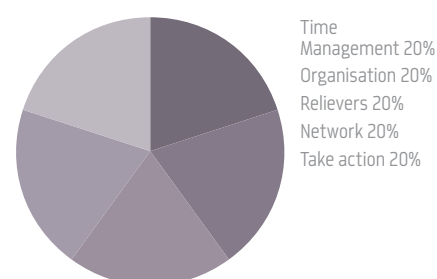
issue is what helps solve this!

Talking about stress management is all well and easy but applying it to everyday life is where the challenge lies. Its normal to stress over exams, results etc. but the key is not letting that stress impact you physically, mentally and emotionally to the point where it hinders you. Therefore, the most important and my concluding point will be ACCEPTANCE. When you change the things you can change and accept the things you can't, it will become easier to manage your stress. If all fails, just drink some coffee and watch Friends. . . it works for me anyway. ■

Stress accelerators



Balance



References:

1. Rosli TI, Abdul Rahman R, Abdul Rahman SR, Ramli R. A survey of perceived stress among undergraduate dental students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Singapore Dent J 2005; 27: 17-22.
2. Sanders AE, Lushington K. Sources of stress for Australian dental students. J Dent Educ 1999; 63: 688-697.