

SMART PHONES

Use of smart phones in clinical settings



BACKGROUND

Smart phones offer some outstanding advantages to busy clinicians. They permit better access to resources to guide point-of-care decision making, the camera and video capabilities can facilitate diagnostic endeavors, and they also offer apps that can supplement teaching in clinical settings. However, they are likely to be a distraction that can compromise the safety of patients. No studies have been done regarding the use of smart phones in clinical dental settings, particularly in relation to their impact on patient safety. A structured questionnaire approach was used to determine the actual use of smart phones in clinical dental settings and the perceived impact on patient safety.

METHODS

The questionnaire was sent to 216 delegates who attended courses in the North West of England 2015-2017. A response rate of 49.5% yielded 107 questionnaires. One hundred five were general dental practitioners and 2 were hospital-based dentists.

RESULTS

Smart Phone Use

Eighty-eight respondents (82.2% of the sample) had a smart phone in the clinic, with 88% of these having it on silent. During their surgical sessions, they received an average of 3 texts, 4 e-mails, and 1 call. A total of 40.9% were unaware they had received a text, 53.4% were unaware of having received an e-mail, and 37.5% were unaware of having received a phone call. Half of those surveyed responded to a text in some way, 46.6% to an e-mail, and 62.5% to a call.

Attitudes Toward Use

Nearly 62% of the respondents believed a mobile phone in a clinical setting was a distraction. In addition, 26.2% often observed dentists using smart phones in the clinical area and 24.3% observed nurses using them.

Suggested Policies

When asked about policies regarding the use of mobile devices in dental clinics, 20.7% stated that smart phones should never be allowed in the clinical setting, 24.1% said they should be allowed but kept on silent and out of view, 16.4% believed they could be used but not in front of patients, and 6.9% said they should be allowed so that apps and the camera could be accessed.

DISCUSSION

The vast majority of survey respondents kept their smart phone with them in the dental clinic. However, 61.7% saw them as a distraction from their clinical duties.

Clinical Significance

Dentists should restrict their use of mobile phones in clinical dentistry settings so that there is no breach of confidentiality, consent, or protection of data principles. Specific policies can be formulated for the dental site, such as allowing smart phones but only if they are on silent and not in the view of the patients. Further research is required to determine why so many dental practitioners believe smart phones are a distraction and yet so many of them still keep them with them in clinical areas. In addition, it's important to understand whether mobile technology of any sort is a risk for compromising patient safety or privacy. The technological benefits need to be appreciated in the light of their adverse effects profile.

Wright S, Crofts G, Ucer TC, et al: Dentists' perceptions of smart phone use in the clinical environment. *Br Dent J* 225:320-324, 2018

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