

# Dental Triology: Practice, Education and Research

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**T**oo often, the question is asked to dentist who has attained clinical residency training and has also contributed in research, "Are you a clinician or a researcher? Do you just sit in the academic building or treat any patients at all?" Similarly, a question, "Are you a dental teacher or practitioner?" Do you just talk about dentistry or at all do it?"

These are an unfortunate questions where the question poser is just interested in getting a binary response. In real world, clinical practice, teaching and research are all overlapping things. There are numerous examples that dentists are involved in more than one of these domains.<sup>1</sup> The old belief that "only competent dentists do practice and those who are not skilled enough to practice, go into academia or research" is nothing but a myth.

Dentistry is a discipline where advancements are taking place on an immense pace. Technology is giving birth to new diagnostic modalities, newer investigations, better understanding of disease mechanisms, innovative procedures leading to superior or more predictable treatment outcomes. All of this has become possible by progress made on research fronts applied into clinical practice. Integration of research and practice has made wonders.

There are five basic services that a dentist can offer to patients. Interesting, with time, each of the following service has evolved into a distinct dental specialty:

1. Remove teeth..... Oral Surgery
2. Move teeth ..... Orthodontics
3. Restore teeth.....Operative Dentistry & Endodontics
4. Replace teeth..... Prosthodontics
5. Maintain teeth.....Periodontology

One can add dental public health (also known as community dentistry) which is a specialty where a dentist can offer a broader role in terms of prevention of oral diseases and that too of population not individual. This has become more important after the establishing of a discipline known as "Periodontal Medicine". This entity in dentistry is coined after late Dr Steven Offenbacher<sup>2</sup> whose tremendous contributions in periodontal research has opened up a new era of periodontal disease-systemic health connections. This has made the role of contemporary dentist more of an oral

physician rather than an educated mechanic. The mechanical-technical motor skills of teeth preparation in fabrication of direct and indirect restorations are still important but understanding of human disease to prevent it before it affects the individual is the biggest service a dentist can offer. But why are dentists in under developed countries not involved in research? The probable explanations are: lack of role models available to them<sup>3</sup>, lack of formal training in research during their formative years in profession, failure to understand the significance and utility of research and lack of any tangible benefits/ incentives associated with research. On the other hand, clinical practice offers a prosperous career, tangible benefits and above all personal freedom. However, the professional satisfaction that comes with teaching and contributing to profession by publishing your research in peer-reviewed publication is unmatched. Only those who invest their time in finding the answers, building the capacity of students and post graduate scholars can attest to it.

It's important to understand that financial security and monetary prosperity is not everything. As a dental healthcare provider, it's our utmost duty to give-back to the profession; teaching and research are the best ways of giving back. The impact on profession of teacher and researcher is far more than a clinician alone. The letter can only treat patients who visit them but formers can positively influence the lives of people living far away from them or in fact can benefit people who are not even born as yet. And what could be more satisfying if a dentist in his/ her career first develops competence in clinical practice, education and research and then give back to the profession by striking a beautiful balance among the stated trilogy of dentistry.

## REFERENCES

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