

Dentists have an obligation to expand their knowledge and to contribute to knowledge

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Prof NH Wood - BChD, DipOdont(MFP), MDent(OMP), FCD(SA), PhD

Dentistry is shaped by dental research, which also drives innovation and improves oral health outcomes. As dental scientists are at the forefront of knowledge, it is important to understand their role in pushing the boundaries of research. Dentistry as a whole must promote the value of developing and funding dental research in South Africa; and draw attention to the urgent need to pay more attention to translational research. We should also emphasize the academic obligations of dental schools and faculty to advance knowledge and contribute to the literature in parallel to the provision of much needed dental services to the people of South Africa.

Dentists have an obligation to expand their knowledge, but also to contribute to knowledge, no matter how small that contribution may be. Academics in the field of dentistry play a key role in pushing the boundaries of knowledge. Their dedication and knowledge enable groundbreaking discoveries and breakthrough technologies to provide the best service and care to patients and communities. Academic staff have an important duty to create an environment conducive to research and academic endeavors and to pass on knowledge to future generations of dentists through integration into teaching and training. Dental research has grown significantly in recent years in South Africa, with great success and breakthroughs. The dedication of dental institutions and researchers to pioneering the frontiers of knowledge is commendable. However, it is important to recognize that there is still a lot of room for growth. Ongoing institutional and financial support is required for dental research in South Africa to continue to progress and reach its full potential. This empowers new and developing dental academics to contribute their voices to the growing knowledge pool in dentistry.

In the South African dentistry scene, translational research, the link between scientific advancements and their implementation in clinical practice, has enormous promise. We can translate scientific discoveries into practical advantages for patients and communities by embracing translational research. Prioritizing and promoting partnerships that make it easier to translate research findings into better oral health outcomes for our population is crucial. In the pursuit of translational research, areas like preventative dentistry, inequities in oral health, and novel treatment methods demand special consideration.

Dentists have academic obligations beyond clinical practice and classroom instruction. This includes actively participating in research, publishing results, and disseminating information to the wider dental community. Scholars who



publish papers in dental literature not only extend known knowledge, but also encourage other researchers to pursue new directions of research and ingenuity.

Academic teachers can contribute to literature in many ways. Publication of research results in prominent publications facilitates discussion and information sharing among colleagues, and is the primary mode of dissemination of new knowledge. Writing a literature review or critical analysis also helps synthesize current data, identify knowledge gaps, and guide further research. Sharing clinical insights and best practices through case studies and clinical guidelines has a profound impact on dental practice and patient care.

But individual efforts alone are not enough. Cooperation and knowledge sharing between the dental school and academic staff are essential to fostering a vibrant research culture. Importantly, this includes much needed support from government. By building research networks and participating in interdisciplinary collaborations, we are able to combine resources, knowledge and perspectives to address complex oral health issues in South Africa. Furthermore, mentorship programs can be crucial in training the next generation of dental researchers and ensuring a continuous stream of progress and innovation.

The dedication and contributions of dental scientists drive progress in dental research in South Africa. But we must understand that it is our duty to promote and facilitate its growth. By focusing on translational research and enhancing academic contributions to literature, we will be able to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice. This will inevitably improve the oral health of our citizens.