

Dental Personality Survey – What Makes a Good Dentist?

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As first year dental students, we wondered if the most important attributes of being a dental professional might vary between patients' and dentists' views. The aim of our research is to simplify the characteristics involved in the patient-dentist interaction and poll members of the public and experienced dentists on their thoughts. We hypothesized that there is a strong correlation between dentists' and patients' perspectives of the model dentist.

We designed a survey with 11 attributes aimed to concisely answer the question "what makes a good dentist/dental practice?" In addition to ranking the characteristics in order of importance, respondents were asked to select three qualities that made a patient stay with a dentist and three more that made a patient's dental visit a positive experience. We surveyed: members of the public as patients, practicing dentists in local Oregon counties, and dental students in years 1-4. The SAS program and chi square tests were used to evaluate the data. Designating importance based on how each population ranked their values, we were able to compare the average opinions of the groups and evaluate data significance.

Patients' and dentists' perceptions were mostly dissimilar, while dental student opinions generally fell in the middle. All three populations did agree that the number one characteristic of the ideal dentist is high quality of his/her work. Significant differences were found between the groups for what kept a patient coming back--patients prioritized technical qualities like quality of work, competency, and cost, while practitioners focused on personality traits like honesty, friendliness, and communication.