

# An investigation into nursing support and the Dental Hygienist and the Dental Hygienist-Therapist

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## Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the working conditions of Dental Hygienists and Dental Hygienist-Therapists in general dental practice in the UK. The aims of the study were to discuss the merits of nursing support,

both to the patient and the clinician, to assess and evaluate the ratio of the profession working alone and in addition Dental Hygienists and Dental Hygiene-Therapists were asked for their viewpoint surrounding this important research area.

## Introduction

In 2009 several dental hygiene and therapy tutors relocated to London from the midlands and the north west of England to accept teaching posts at Kings College Hospital. Once in post a series of discussions identified that there were fewer opportunities to work with the assistance of a Dental Nurse in the south of England than had been the case in the areas from which the authors had originated. It was agreed to explore whether this was a geographic trend. It was also agreed to investigate if nursing support is beneficial to patients. In addition, if clinical support is available, might it prevent injury or the stress and feelings of isolation that Dental Hygienists have reported in the UK and other countries?

## Method

This retrospective analysis used a mixed method approach, both qualitative and quantitative information. A seven question survey was designed and constructed utilising the Kwik Survey software ([www.kwiksurvey.com](http://www.kwiksurvey.com)). The seven questions included demographic information based on geographical distribution and date of graduation. Three quantitative questions were posed looking at nursing support, injury and stress incidence. Two questions allowed a personal viewpoint looking at perceptions of nursing support and

how the presence or lack of this impacts on the working day.

Dental Hygienists and Dental Hygienist-Therapists were invited to complete the anonymous questionnaire on a website forum [www.hygienist.co.uk](http://www.hygienist.co.uk), which has over 400 subscribers, and two publications. Members and non members of the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT) were invited to take part in the survey via Dental Health, the Society's journal and Smile magazine, a free publication distributed to all Dental Hygienists by Purple Media. The survey was open from December 2009 and closed on 30th May 2010.

A literature review was undertaken in the relevant areas: there are several published studies looking at musculoskeletal disorders carried out in Canada, USA, Australia and more recently in the UK. In 2005 Gorter et al<sup>1</sup> published an investigation into burnout and stress in the dental hygiene profession. There is a direct correlation between the results in the Gorter study and the work that has been carried out in this study.

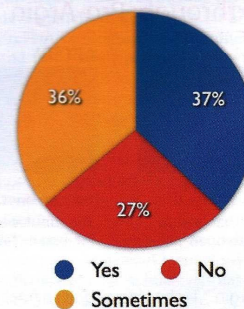
## Results

A total of 78 respondents completed the questionnaires (73 females and 5 males); 77% of respondents were

dental hygienists and 23% were dental therapists.

The year of qualification varied greatly with the average year being 1994.

Figure 1  
Q3: Do you work with a nurse?



A total of 28 respondents (36%) worked with the assistance of a dental nurse on a part-time basis to provide help with certain tasks including the taking of radiographs and aid with decontamination and cross infection procedures between patients. For those clinicians with a mixed list of restorative and periodontal procedures, 29 respondents (37%) had full time nursing support. A further 21 respondents (27%) had no nursing support. There was an opportunity for