Information Needs of Community Dental Professionals in North Carolina

Tina Crenshaw, PhD, MSEd, MLS (expected 5/07), Clinical Psychologist and Graduate Assistant, Rachel Wilfert, MD, MPH, Research Associate for Training and Education, NC Center for Public Health Preparedness, NC Institute for Public Health, Diana McDuffee, MLS, Librarian and ILS Network Director, MaryBeth Schell, MLS, Associate Librarian and Manager, AHEC Digital Library, AHEC Information & Library System, Health Sciences Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Objectives

The purpose of the study was to identify the information needs of dental professionals, with the intent of using the results to develop a collection of resources within the AHEC Digital Library that would be of interest to this provider group.

Methods

Sample

- 264 dental professionals, including dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants

Measure

- One-page written survey
- Open-ended and closed-ended questions
- Asked which information resources were used most frequently and the purposes for consulting information resources

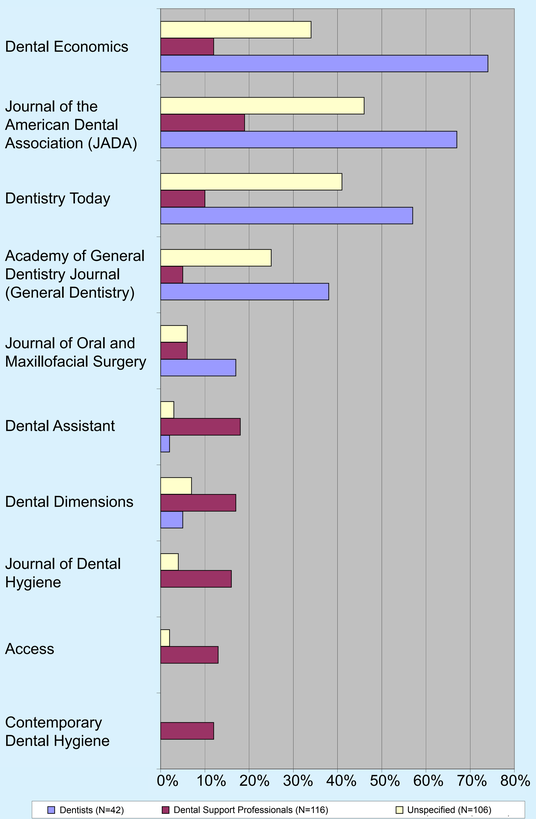
Procedure

- Surveys administered to participants in dental Continuing Education programs from January to March, 2006

Results

- Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the sample consulted the literature on at least a monthly basis for clinical decision-making.
- Seventy-six percent (76%) of dentists consulted information resources for practice management and/or administration.
- The type of information resource consulted most frequently for the purpose of practice management was periodicals.
- Continuing Education and Staying Current were reported by 17% and 10% of participants as other reasons for consulting information resources.
- Twenty-three percent (23%) of the sample reported consulting the Internet for information.
- Internet resources consulted most frequently by dental support professionals were the Colgate and Crest company Web sites.
- Internet resources consulted most frequently by dentists were Medline, PubMed, and National Institutes of Health (NIH) Web sites.

Journals Consulted By Dental Professionals



Results shown as percentage of each dental provider group that reported reading the journal regularly

Implications

- Clinical decision-making, practice management, continuing education, and staying current were all reasons cited by study participants for consulting the dental literature.
- All of these purposes could be supported through the AHEC Digital Library, with the addition of specific electronic resources. Additional research on availability, cost, and usefulness of adding the titles most frequently consulted by survey participants will have to be explored.
- The survey found a high level of interest among dentists in resources dealing with practice management and administration. The AHEC Digital Library could provide dentists with trial memberships to its *Health Business and Health Administration* collection, so that the relevance of this collection to dentists could be tested.