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AAO Foundation Final Report Form (a/o 5/30/2021)

In an attempt to make things a little easier for the reviewer who will read this report, please consider these two questions before this is sent for review:

- Is this an example of your very best work, in that it provides sufficient explanation and justification, and is something otherwise worthy of publication? (We do publish the Final Report on our website, so this does need to be complete and polished.)*
- Does this Final Report provide the level of detail, etc. that you would expect, if you were the reviewer?*

Please prepare a report that addresses the following:

Type of Award: Research Aid Award

Name(s) of Principal Investigator(s): Daniel Lee, Laura Jacox

Institution: UNC Chapel Hill

Title of Project: Identifying Factors that Impact General Dentist Referrals to Orthodontists

Period of AAOF Support: 07-01-2019 to 06-30-2021

Amount of Funding: \$5,000

Abstract:
Abstract

Introduction: Referrals from general dentists are a significant source of orthodontic patients, but our knowledge of factors guiding referral decisions predates recent marketplace trends of direct-to-consumer products and broad digitization. To provide orthodontists with current, nationwide data on referral values and communication preferences, a mixed methods study was conducted.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with practicing general dentists (n=23) and interviews were analyzed to identify factors important to communication and referrals.

Qualitative data provided the foundation to develop and pre-test a survey, distributed nationally to American Dental Association general dentists through email (n=373). Survey results were evaluated using bivariate and descriptive statistics.

Results: While 42% of general dentists provide orthodontics, of those, 68% report insufficient orthodontic training in dental school and 61% have increased orthodontic care in recent years.

General dentists refer to orthodontists for complex cases and growing patients, with the orthodontist's perceived skill and proximity to the patient, being important for choosing a specific orthodontic practice. Phone (70%) and email (61%) are the most utilized inter-office communication methods, with email (40%) and then phone (30%) being the most preferred. The most important aspects of a working relationship were patient satisfaction and final occlusal outcome, while the best way to boost referrals was through improving communication.

Conclusions: Excellent care and patient satisfaction remain primary motivators for referrals from generalists to orthodontists. Improved orthodontic curriculum is needed for general dentists.

Good communication with dentists is critical for growing referral streams and enhancing patient care.

Highlights

- Dentists refer to orthodontists for complex cases and growing patients.
- Dentists choose orthodontists based on perceived skill and proximity to the patient.
- The most preferred communication method is email.
- Doctor relationships rely on patient satisfaction and good clinical outcomes.
- The best way to boost referrals is through improved communication.

Respond to the following questions:

1. Were the original, specific aims of the proposal realized?
We were able to realize the original specific aims of the proposal.

2. Were the results published?

The results were submitted for publication at AJODO. When and if it is published, AAOF should be acknowledge.

3. Have the results of this proposal been presented?

The results of this proposal were presented for the Master's thesis of Daniel Lee. AAOF support was acknowledged.

4. To what extent have you used, or how do you intend to use, AAOF funding to further your career?

At this point, I plan to support AAOF more for future orthodontists and residents, but it is not clear when and if I will be a beneficiary at this point.

Accounting for Project: Due to the costs of buying the commercial email lists, participant incentives for survey participation and consulting work for the Odum Institute for the survey creation and statistical analysis, the funds were all used.