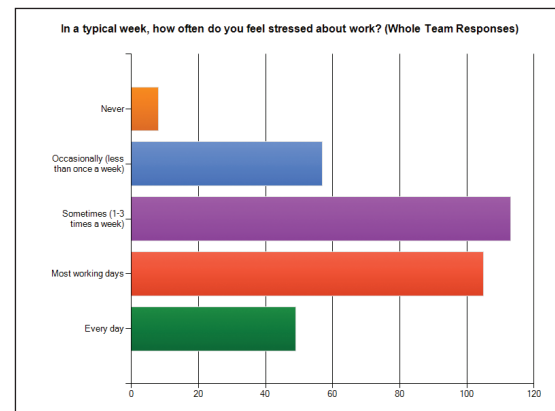
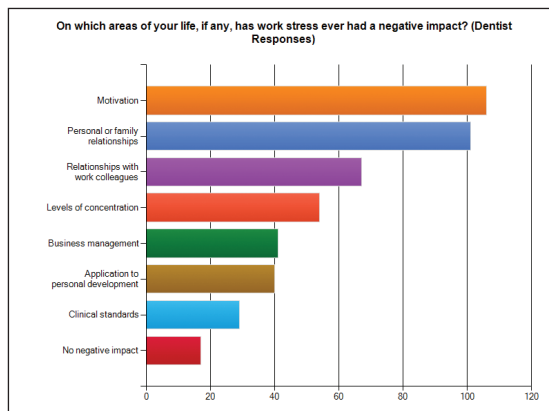
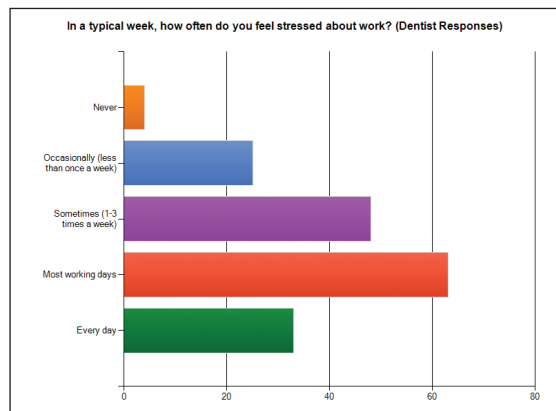


Stress in dentistry – a study

Clinical hypnotherapist Joanna Taylor investigates managing stress in the dental team



It is well known that dentistry is a stressful profession, but just what causes the stress, and to what extent does it affect the rest of the team? To this end, in late 2011 I invited dental professionals to take part in a study to determine some of the major causes of stress within the dental team; the survey also asked what effects stress had on the lives of the respondents, and what measures, if any, they took to help manage or reduce their stress.

Key facts – the survey says...

- 45% of dentist respondents said they suffer with insomnia
- 52% of all respondents said running late was the major cause of stress
- 63% of all respondents said stress had an impact on their motivation
- 60% of all respondents said stress affected personal or family relationships
- 49% of dentists use sport as a stress management tool

Survey results

Of the 347 respondents, 178 were principal or associate dentists and the remaining 169 were DCPs and other members of the dental team.

Of the dentists who took part, over a third (36%) stated that they were stressed about their work during most working days, nearly a fifth (19%) felt stressed every day, over a quarter (28%) felt stressed between one and three times a week, 14% less than once a week and 2% reported never feeling stressed. The majority (58%) felt that there was no particular time of day which was more stressful.

Nearly half of dentists (48%) listed running late as being their main cause of stress, followed by patient complaints (32%), compliance (30%), money (29%) and work-life balance (26%). Other significant causes of stress included conflicts between team members (21%), dealing with phobic or anxious patients (20%) and gappy appointment books (20%). As a comparison, results for the team as a whole demonstrated that running late was the major cause of stress (52%), with conflicts between team members showing next at 32%, followed by work-life balance at 28%.

The stress suffered by dentists appears to cause a significant incidence of physical symptoms, with nearly a half (45%) suffering from insomnia; other significant symptoms include tiredness (43%), anxiety (40%), bruxism (31%), headaches (30%) and depression (27%) amongst others. Only 15% stated they had experienced no physical symptoms from their stress.

By far, the most negative impact stress has had on the lives of the dentists taking part in the survey was on their motivation, with 63% of respondents being affected, and on personal or family relationships (60%), while 40%

stated that relationships with work colleagues have also suffered. Nearly a third (32%) felt that their levels of concentration were reduced and, significantly, 17% felt that stress had affected their clinical standards. Only 10% of respondents felt that stress had had no negative impact on their lives.

Popular stress management tools for dentists include sport, with nearly half (49%) using this as one of their main method of stress reduction, while over a third (36%) found alcohol to be useful and 29% used reading. Techniques such as deep breathing, self-hypnosis, meditation and yoga are also popular, again being used by nearly half (45%) of respondents. Other methods used included watching television (29%) and taking medication (10%), while talking to friends and family, social networking, music, gardening and changing jobs were given as some alternatives.

Real-life stories

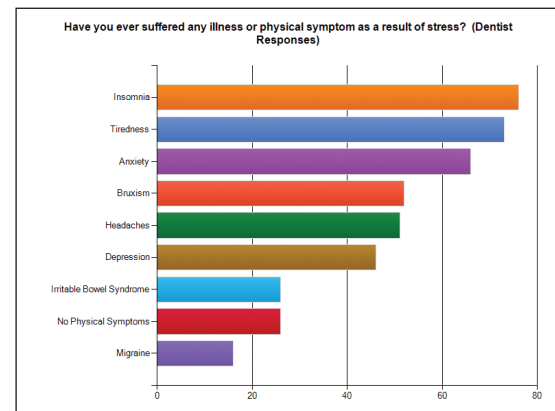
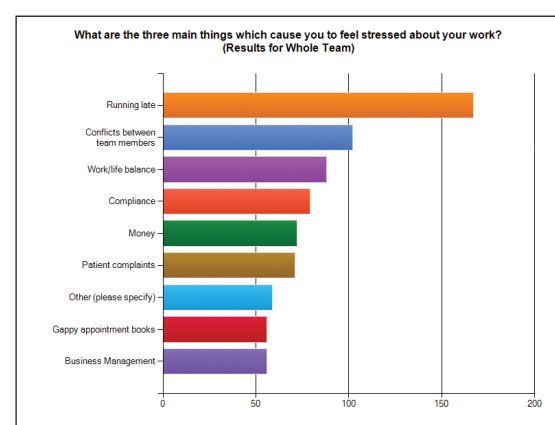
As the survey was conducted anonymously, a number of respondents felt able to give further information about the problems that work stress has caused them. They included the associate struggling to cope with unmotivated staff, who feels excluded by the partners; the therapist who is verbally attacked on a regular basis by another team member; the principal dentist who had attempted suicide, struggling with a work/life balance that gives insufficient time for the friendships outside of work that would help redress the balance.

Root causes

The survey demonstrates that, despite the useful techniques employed to manage it, stress is still having a significant negative impact on the health and motivation of individuals within the dental team. The key to making a difference here has to be by addressing the root cause, and the main causes of stress for the majority of the team are shown to be produced by internal factors within the practice such as running late and conflicts between team members.

These are things that are within our power to change, through improved training and communication. If your current working practices are causing stress within your team, then it is time to look at how things can be improved, and to discuss options and possible solutions. When you consider just how much that stress could be affecting your team's motivation, clinical standards and physical health, and translate that into the effects on your practice's efficiency and profitability, can you really afford not to take action?

At the very least, this survey shows that stress is a very real problem for the majority of the dental team – and that does mean for your practice, too. The practices who survive and flourish through these times of increased bu-



reaucacy and financial instability will be the ones who take action to do something about this; to make sure their staff are trained properly, that their appointment system is efficient and effective so the dentists do not run permanently late, that their associates are supported, that conflicts between team members are resolved quickly through good communication and that bullying is not tolerated under any circumstances.

Communication between members of the dental team has never been more important; a problem shared is not just a problem that more people have, it is an exponential increase in the creativity required to find the solution.

Make sure that 2012 is the year you decide to make a difference to the mental health of your team by making a positive effort to reduce the causes of stress, and thereby help to create a practice where both your colleagues and your patients feel respected, valued and cared for.

Joanna Taylor is practice manager at John Taylor Dental Care in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. She is a clinical hypnotherapist and NLP master practitioner, and an INLPTA Certified Trainer. She provides courses and in-house training in communication skills, stress management and hypnosis for the dental team in addition to one-to-one coaching and therapy. For more information, email joanna@joanna-taylor.co.uk or visit www.joanna-taylor.co.uk

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