

## **Clinician-Patient Small Talk: Comparing Competent Students and Expert Dentists in a Standardized Patient Encounter**

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **Objectives:**

To establish whether the frequency of non-diagnostic, non-management exchanges between clinicians and patient (socioemotional communication, SC) during the consultation differed between senior dental students and dentists, controlling for clinically driven exchanges of information.

#### **Methods:**

Dentists and students were recorded while undergoing a consultation with a live standardized patient, and subsequently interviewed by investigators; their shared interpretation of cognitive strategies were recorded and compared for differences in the presence of SC using a  $\chi^2$  test; first consultation occurrence of SC using log-rank tests; and number of times that SC occurred using mixed-model ANOVA.

#### **Results:**

Most clinicians engaged in SC throughout the consultation with a few exceptions. Statistical analyses produced non-significant differences for overall SC presence ( $p=0.62$ ), time to first instance of SC from overall start of the consultation ( $p=0.73$ ), and time after first intra-oral examination had taken place ( $p=0.76$ ). Non-significant differences were also recorded for the summary of time intervals when SC occurred at time from overall start of the consultation ( $p=0.89$ ), and time after first intra-oral examination had taken place ( $p=0.12$ ).

#### **Conclusions:**

SC occurred in most clinicians. Patterns depicted this interaction occurring throughout the consultation, not concentrated at the beginning or end. SC did not appear to differ between experts and students in terms of prevalence, frequency, or timing. Future research should examine the detailed association between SC and diagnostic thinking processes, to further delineate their relationship and characterize possible pedagogical applications.