

## ABSTRACT

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The concept of interpersonal skills and its relevance in the dentist-patient relationship was investigated. In **Study I**, general dentists responding to a mailed questionnaire reported that the ideal characteristics of a good dentist can be divided into three categories: 1) interpersonal skills; 2) clinical skills; and 3) other skills. The relative importance of a number of listed attributes in dentistry were: contact with patients, communication skills, empathy, manual skills and theoretical knowledge, in that order.

In **Studies II and III**, dentists specialized in the treatment of dental phobia were interviewed. The analysis of the transcribed interviews was influenced by the principles of Grounded Theory. In Study II, characteristics of the patient-centered dental consultation were identified, including categories of 'Holistic perception and understanding of the patient'; 'The dentist's positive outlook on people'; and 'The dentist's positive view of patient contact'. In study III, the following categories described the dynamics of interpersonal processes in the dentist-patient encounter: 'Relatedness, based on affective resonance and concordant roles'; 'The dental phobic patient's emotions'; 'The patient's verbal and nonverbal cues'; 'The dentist's role as a clinician: professional interpersonal skills'; and 'The dentist's role as a fellow-being: general interpersonal skills'. The results of studies II and III have a theoretical implication and are supported by previous models of patient-centered medicine and the dynamics of the doctor-patient consultation.

In **Study IV** the factor structure of the Swedish version of the Getz's Dental Beliefs Survey was investigated based on a dental phobic patient population. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated two solutions: a one-factor (scree plot) solution 'Communication'; and a three-factor (eigenvalues) solution: 'Communication', 'Trust', and 'Fear of Negative Information'. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), however, suggested a five-factor solution: 'Communication', 'Trust', 'Fear of Negative Information', 'Lack of Control' and 'Social Interaction Distress in Dental Treatment (SIDDT)'. Neither the EFA nor the CFA confirmed the four-factor structure suggested by the constructors of the DBS. Moreover, the items included in the dimensions were also partly different from the original version of the DBS. The results from the two factor analyses indicated that the factor structure of the DBS is ambiguous. Finally, it was concluded that the DBS measures a complex phenomenon with the help of only a few items.

The results from the four studies contribute to a better understanding of the concept of interpersonal skills in dentistry from the perspective of the dentist, and indirectly of the patient. Concepts and categories that were identified in Studies I, II and III were in accordance with the contents of the items and the labels of the DBS factors, investigated in Study IV. The significance of dentists' interpersonal skills when treating patients, particularly with dental phobia, was confirmed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Key words: Interpersonal skills, dentist-patient relationship, dental phobia, patient-centered dentistry, Grounded Theory, qualitative method, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Dental Beliefs Survey

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