To: Erika Paterson, ENGL 301 Professor

From: Kristy Vyfschaft, ENGL 301 Student

Date: June 22, 2022

Subject: Proposal for Evaluating the Mental Health Concerns in a Dental Practice and the Feasibility of an in-office Mental Health Program

**Audience Description**

The primary audience for the formal report is the practice owner and employer Dr. S. The practice owner is the highest ranking and makes the final decisions within and for the company. The secondary audiences are the managerial teams at each office. Office managers oversee the daily operations with staff and patients with the authority to implement changes at the office level and report back to Dr. S.

**Introduction**

Dentistry is a stressful profession and those working in the dental field are at risk for mental illness. In dentistry there are a high number of daily stressors including long working hours, a heavy workload, working in small spaces, and helping clients in pain while working on a sensitive part of the body. Most professionals in dentistry are high achievers, perfectionists, and are detail-oriented putting them at higher risk of experiencing symptoms of mental illness. Symptoms of psychological illness range from changes in sleep and diet, irritability, nervousness, feelings of worthlessness, and suicidal thoughts. Many are facing depression, anxiety, and burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional exhaustion resulting in the individual becoming detached and withdrawn.

The recent global crisis has increased the pressure and stress in the dental practice and professionals are facing increased anxiety since the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional stresses include fear of contagion, job insecurity, staffing shortages, and difficulty finding protective equipment. The stressors from the pandemic combined with daily stresses contribute to a profession that is overwhelmed with mental health concerns.

**Statement of the Problem**

Dental professionals with unmanaged mental illness may have a negative impact on the dental team and their abilities to practice competent dentistry. Individuals with advanced mental health concerns could have frequent absences from work, lessened productivity, and reduced clinical performance. Professionals in the field are reluctant to seek help in fear of losing their job or creating a poor reputation and many lack the adequate support and coping mechanisms to manage day-to-day in practice. Without support dental professionals continue to struggle in their professional and personal lives, while patient care continues to decrease. There is a need to address the mental well-being of dental professionals to improve patient and practitioner health.

**Proposed Solution**

A possible solution to the mental health problem in the dental practice is the implementation of a mental health and wellness program at the offices providing support, education, and resources to the team. Implementing the program could address the mental health needs for the team by decreasing stress and managing mental health symptoms. Recently, mental health awareness has increased creating a demand for support in the dental practice.

**Scope**

To evaluate the current mental health impacts in the dental practice and the feasibility of a mental health program I plan to pursue the following areas of inquiry:

1. What are the current stressors in the workplace?
2. How many professionals are experiencing symptoms of poor mental health?
3. What current stress or mental health management techniques are being used and how frequently?
4. Would workplace training and resources meet the mental health demands of the dental team?
5. How could the program be made easily accessible?
6. What is the cost to implement the mental health and wellness program?

**Methods**

The primary source of data will be an anonymous online survey. Using an anonymous survey may yield a larger number of honest responses as the topic is sensitive in nature and sending the survey to administrative and clinical staff will provide a well-rounded collection of data. A further primary source will be observations about working conditions and stress management methods already in place.

Secondary data will be online publications and global studies relating to mental health in the dental practice and comparisons of active programs in similar healthcare environments.

**My Qualifications**

As a registered dental hygienist for over ten years, I am familiar with the dental culture, various working conditions, and colleagues’ concerns. I am currently studying at the University of British Columbia; enhancing my research skills to gather credible data and provide recommendations based on the information.

**Conclusion**

Action needs to be taken to reduce stress and mental illness in the dental practices to improve the mental well-being of team members and maintain optimal patient care. By addressing the areas of inquiry, I can examine the current mental health concerns in the practices and determine the feasibility of a mental health and wellness program. With your approval I will begin my research.