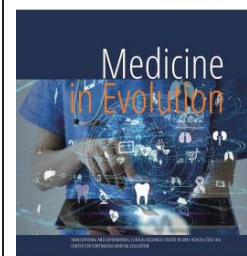


The role of communication in the success of therapeutic interventions in dental practice



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Abstract

The professional relationship between dentists and patients encompasses the provision of medical care and needs to be completed by an ethical and accurate communication. This highlights the significant emphasis placed on the interaction between medical staff and patients in medical practice. The success of dental treatments also hinges on the dentist's ability to establish a connection through communication with patients, paying attention to their needs, and demonstrating empathy and care towards them. **Materials and Methods:** For this observational-prospective study it was developed a questionnaire consisting of 10 closed-ended questions. The aim is to assess patients' opinions regarding the role and impact of communication in their relationship with dentists and on the success of medical treatment. **Results and Discussions:** The results indicate that the majority of patients evaluate their collaboration with dentists from a medical perspective but also through the way of communication and interaction quality. There is a strong emphasis on how healthcare providers are aware by their patient's needs, demonstrating empathy and skills in their professional collaborations. **Conclusions:** The primary conclusion of this study centers on the development of communication skills among dentists to achieve successful therapeutic outcomes, given the increasing needs of patients in the present context.

Keywords: communication, dentist, patient, empathy, non-verbal communication, dental treatment

INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, communication has become an effective tool for improved outcomes in our society and moreover in medical field. Communication improves health, medical education and influence the social and behavioral changes that aim patient health. Population's behavior regarding oral health may change through an effective transmission of medical information being dependent on the dentist's communication skills and a strategic approach in communication [1,2].

In the context of health issues, most patients feel helpless and vulnerable but gaining their trust is essential for their comfort and compliance. It is important that each interaction to be viewed as an opportunity for bidirectional information exchange and as a chance to establish a partnership with the shared goal of healing or safeguarding health [3,4]. Communication skills ensure the efficient time management, comprehension of recommendations and treatments, optimal health outcomes, and a high level of patient satisfaction [5].

For effective communication between dentist and patient, it is crucial to analyze the interaction process from the perspective of both parties involved. The patients' perspective on their interaction with the dentist will be influenced by how they understand and internalize their health issue, how they manage the uncertainty regarding the progression of their condition, and the extent to which they are involved in decision-making and compliance with the medical staff [6,7].

Patients' perspectives on communication are influenced, on one hand, by the content of the interaction and, on the other hand, by variables related to their perception of health [8]. It is challenging to determine which variables are most crucial for improving communication between dentists and patients. None of the investigations, dental treatments, or technology can be used to its maximum potential for patient if it is not accompanied by effective information exchange, coordination, and collaboration between patients and healthcare providers [9,10]. Studies show that dentists and patients attribute different meanings to the concept of "competent medical personnel." While dentists consider that a key criteria for a competent dentist is the ability to accurately diagnose. Patients prioritize how well their health needs are met through effective communication, which is grounded in empathy [11, 12]. The information and explanations provided by dentists form the core of the communication in their relationship with patients. Through the communicated information, the dentist clarifies various aspects related to the patient's health status, thereby reducing their level of uncertainty and anxiety regarding the medical procedure [13].

It is evident that the provision of information holds significant importance, and studies indicate that patients who receive clear and relevant information through effective communication exhibit higher levels of treatment adherence, thereby achieving the anticipated medical outcomes [14,15].

Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to highlight the benefits of effective communication in the patient relationship, which can ensure optimal therapeutic compliance in the medical field characterized by numerous diagnostic and therapeutic manoeuvres.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research of the role of communication in dental medical practice focuses on conducting an observational-prospective study, which involves a questionnaire composed of

10 closed-ended questions. The questionnaire evaluate patients' opinions regarding the role and implications of communication in their relationship with dentists and its impact on the success of therapeutical dental procedures.

The time allocated for responding to the questionnaire was one week, and it was distributed to 50 patients from various dental practices in Timiș County. The responses were compiled and analyzed statistically and the questionnaire was distributed in both printed and electronic formats via different social media platforms.

Patients completed an appendix to the questionnaire, which included their consent to participate in the study, after being informed about the purpose of the research. They had the right to ask any questions they considered necessary regarding the study and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any adverse consequences.

The questionnaire developed began with a section providing general information about the patients' background (Urban/Rural). The first question aimed to assess patients' opinions about the benefits of integrating the three forms of communication—verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal—during their interaction with the dentist in medical practice. We sought to examine if patients use not only verbal communication but also non-verbal and para-verbal communication when interacting with their dentist, and how these forms of communication have assisted them in the interaction.

The second question in the questionnaire was based on the premise of language barriers in medical communication, considering that most patients lack specialized medical knowledge. We aimed to evaluate their opinions on the extent to which dentists should be attentive and strive to simplify the terminology used when conveying messages, so that the information communicated is understood correctly.

The third question in the questionnaire addresses a crucial element of the communication process: active listening. We aimed to evaluate if patients understand the concept of active listening and to gauge how this understanding contributes to improving the communication process in their relationship with the dentist.

The fourth question analyzed the implications of effective communication in dental medical practice concerning the increase in patients' trust in the healthcare system. We aimed to assess if patients feel more confident in collaborating with dentists when their interactions are effective and free from communication barriers.

For question number five, patients were asked about the role of empathy in communication. Specifically, they were inquired if they believe a dentist who demonstrates empathy can develop a closer connection with them, thereby fostering cohesion. The aim was to explore whether dentists should exhibit empathy in their relationship with all patients or whether it should be more pronounced when interacting with minor or elderly patients.

The sixth question aims to analyze potential dysfunctions that may arise in the communication process between dental practitioners and patients when using closed-ended questions. It is based on the existence of two types of questions that can be posed during an interaction: closed-ended and open-ended questions, each serving its specific purpose. We seek to explore from the patients' perspective whether open-ended questions are preferable in interactions with dentists, as they might allow for more effective communication. Additionally, we aim to investigate whether closed-ended questions are more suitable for interactions with emotionally distressed patients or if, in these cases as well, open-ended questions would be more beneficial.

Question number seven was included to analyze the extent to which a dentist should adapt and individualize their communication style for each patient, given that each patient is unique. We aim to investigate whether the communication rules in medical practice can be universally applied to all patients or if it is beneficial for the dentist to adjust their

communication style to meet the needs of each individual patient. Additionally, we seek to explore whether patients consider it beneficial for them to take into account the type of dentist they are interacting with during the course of their professional relationship.

Question number eight in the questionnaire addresses a highly relevant and current topic in dental medical practice: the usefulness of organizing professional training courses in medical communication sciences. Given that the dental profession today requires not only medical knowledge but also the development of communication skills, we analyzed how beneficial it would be for dentists to receive training and guidance from specialists in communication regarding the rules and techniques they should consider when interacting with patients.

Question number nine examines one of the most important elements of non-verbal communication: eye contact. We aim to evaluate the extent to which dentists use eye contact as a form of non-verbal communication when interacting with patients and how this contributes to conveying a sense of security in the medical encounter.

Question number ten aims to analyze the feedback in the communication between dentists and patients. We determined whether providing feedback from patients at the end of the conversation contributes to enhancing communication in medical practice and if is helping the dentist to understand whether the information conveyed was correctly understood by the patient or not.

RESULTS

The collected data were analyzed based on the patients' background. For question 1, according to the results, out of 50 patients, 12 from rural areas and 34 from urban areas believe that using verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal communication is effective during the medical procedure in interactions with the dentist. They hold the view that integrating these three forms of communication is much more beneficial for accurately conveying messages. Two patients from rural areas and two from urban areas, believe that this approach is beneficial in communication with the dentist, but not in all cases. None of patients rejected the usefulness of employing these three forms of communication.

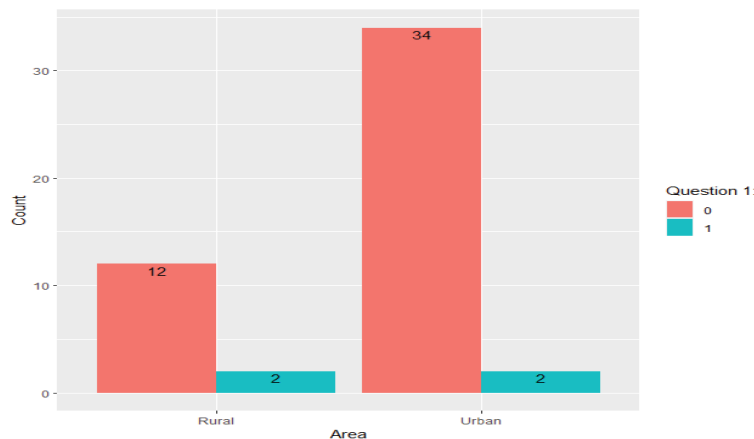


Figure 1. Statistical results for question 1 according to urban and rural environment

Question 2, upon compiling the questionnaires, it was found that 13 from rural and 32 from urban areas believe it is very important for the dentist to minimize specialized language, particularly when dealing with patients who lack specialized medical knowledge or education. This practice helps facilitate a correct understanding of the conveyed information

and removes potential communication barriers. Only 1 patient, one from rural and 4 from urban areas, stated that minimizing specialized language does not always eliminate communication barriers, but only in certain situations, thus not allowing for a general conclusion. It is notable that no patient considered this measure to be unhelpful, indicating that all patients prefer medical staff to communicate information in a clear, coherent manner, avoiding ambiguities caused by complex terminology.

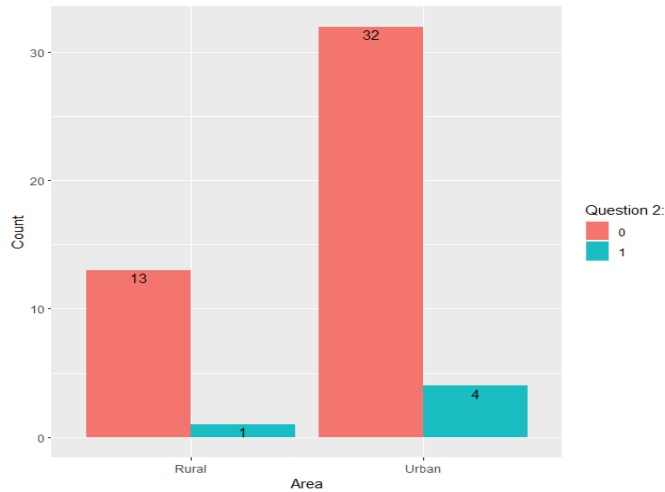


Figure 2. Statistical results for question 2 according to urban and rural environment

Question 3: Do you believe that active listening represents one of the most important rules in the communication process between the dentist and patients? 0 - Yes; 1 - I lack knowledge about what active listening represents in the communication process, and therefore cannot provide a pertinent opinion on this subject; 2 - No. Among the 50 patients surveyed, 13 from rural areas and 32 from urban areas consider active listening to be one of the most important rules in the communication process between the dentist and patients. Three patients from urban areas did not provide an opinion on this matter due to their lack of understanding of what active listening entails in communication. Additionally, two patients—one from rural areas and one from urban areas—do not believe that active listening improves the relationship in dental medical practice.

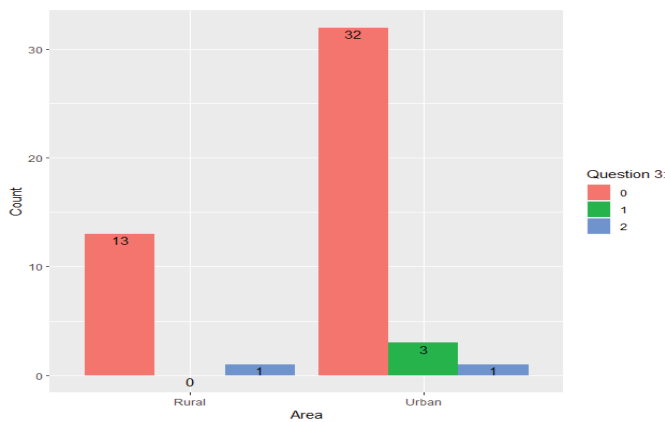


Figure 3. Statistical results for question 3 according to urban and rural environment

Question 4: Do you believe that effective communication between medical staff and patients will increase the patients' trust in the healthcare system? 0 – Yes, in all situations; 1 – Yes, but not in all situations; 2 – No. 10 subjects from rural and 31 from urban areas stated that effective communication in medical practice with all medical staff would increase their trust in the healthcare system. Patients would approach specialists with greater opening. A small number of patients (4 from rural and 3 from urban areas) believe that effective communication with medical staff does not automatically lead to increased trust in the healthcare system in all cases. Additionally, only 2 patients from urban areas responded negatively to this question.

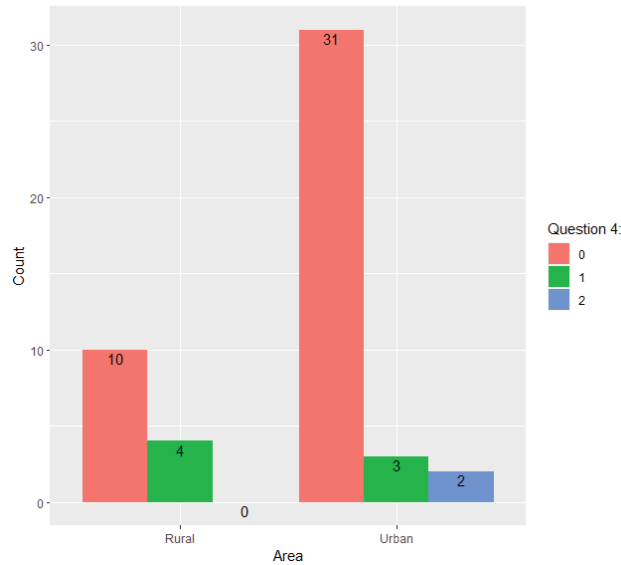


Figure 4. Statistical results for question 4 according to urban and rural environment

The results for question 5 show that out of the 50 patients surveyed, 4 from rural areas and 19 from urban areas believe that it is very important for the dentist to show empathy during communication, particularly when dealing with elderly patients or minor patients accompanied by their guardians. They feel that an empathetic approach facilitates communication. Nine patients from rural and 16 from urban areas consider empathy to be very important in the communication process, regardless of the patients' age. Only 2 participants in the study (one from rural and one from urban areas) do not believe that empathetic dentists will interact and communicate more effectively in practice.

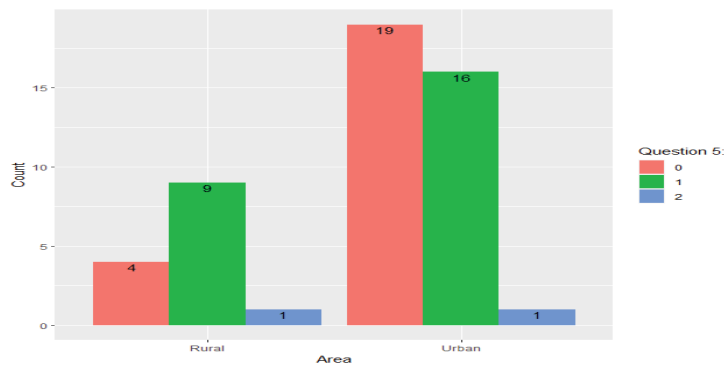


Figure 5. Statistical results for question 5 according to urban and rural environment

Question 6: Do you believe that asking closed-ended questions by the dentist during communication with patients somewhat hinders interaction by limiting patients' ability to express their ideas and feelings? Out of the 50 patients surveyed, 9 from rural areas and 22 from urban areas believe that asking closed-ended questions by the dentist can somewhat hinder interaction by restricting patients' ability to express their ideas and emotions. A smaller number of patients (4 from rural areas and 14 from urban areas) stated that closed-ended questions can be useful when the dentist is dealing with emotionally expressive patients. Only one patient from rural areas felt that closed-ended questions do not create any dysfunctions in the communication process.

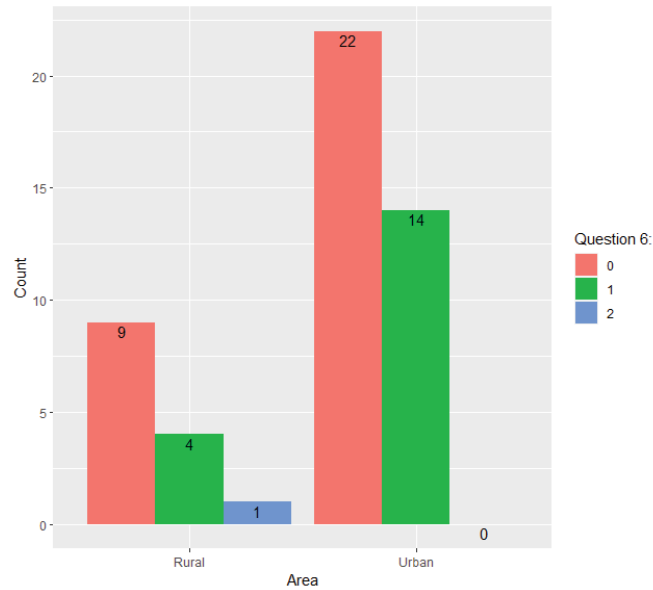


Figure 6. Statistical results for question 6 according to urban and rural environment

Question 7: Do you believe that for effective collaboration, communication should be adapted to each type of patient? Regarding the importance of adapting communication in dental practice depending by each patient, 10 from rural and 26 from urban areas believe that the dentist should adapt their communication style to the needs of each patient for effective interaction. Three patients from rural and 10 from urban areas felt that not only should the dentist adapt their communication style, but patients should also adjust their communication approach based on the type of dentist they are interacting with. Only one patient from rural area did not consider this aspect important in their interaction with the dentist.

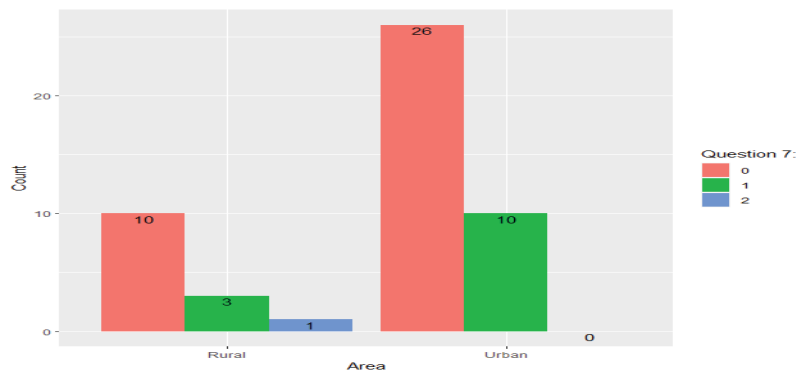


Figure 7. Statistical results for question 7 according to urban and rural environment

Question 8: Do you consider professional training courses in communication useful in medical practice? Eleven patients from rural areas and 36 from urban believe that professional training courses focused on communication in medical practice, conducted by specialists in the field, are extremely useful. One patient from rural areas consider that these courses are useful, but not in all situations. Additionally, 2 patients from rural area do not believe that participating in these courses adds value to medical communication.

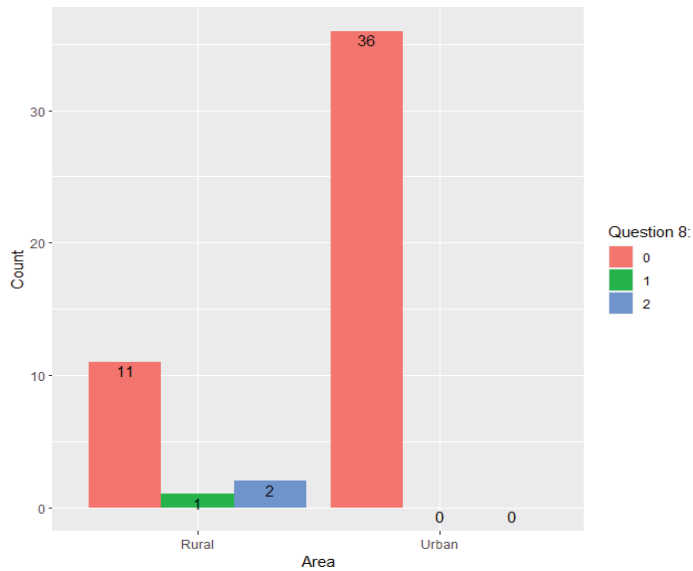


Figure 8. Statistical results for question 8 according to urban and rural environment

Question 9: Does eye contact during the communication of information by the dentist capture the patient's attention regarding the message being conveyed and simultaneously convey a greater sense of security about the medical procedure? Regarding this question, 12 subjects from rural areas and 34 from urban areas consider that eye contact during the communication of information by the dentist effectively captures the patient's attention to the conveyed message and conveys a greater sense of security about the medical procedure. Only three patients, 2 from rural areas and 1 from urban areas, believe that this aspect of non-verbal communication is not beneficial in all situations, particularly with emotionally sensitive patients. Additionally, one patient from urban areas answered negatively to this question.

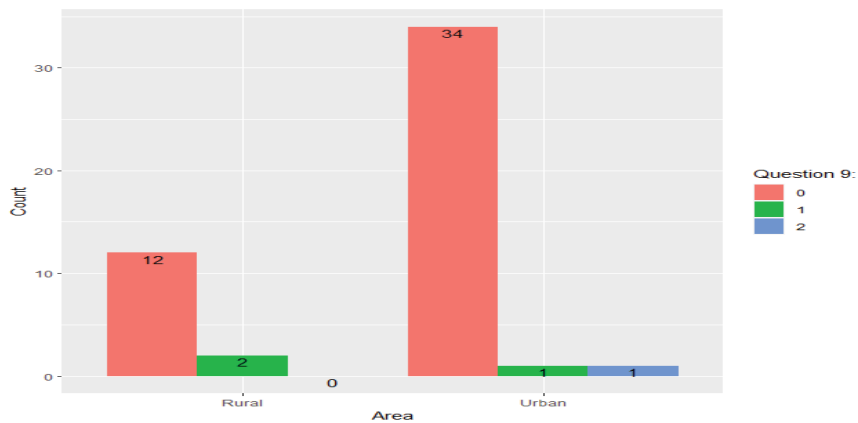


Figure 9. Statistical results for question 9 according to urban and rural environment

Question 10: Do you consider that feedback provided by patients at the end of the consultation is an important element in communication with dentists? According to the last question of the questionnaire, 12 subjects from rural areas and 36 from urban areas believe that feedback is extremely important and should be provided by patients at the end of the interaction with the dentist. This allows the dentist to see if the information given was understood and perceived correctly by the patients. Only one patient from the rural area does not think that feedback ensures effective communication in all situations, and one patient from the rural area also gave a negative response to this question.

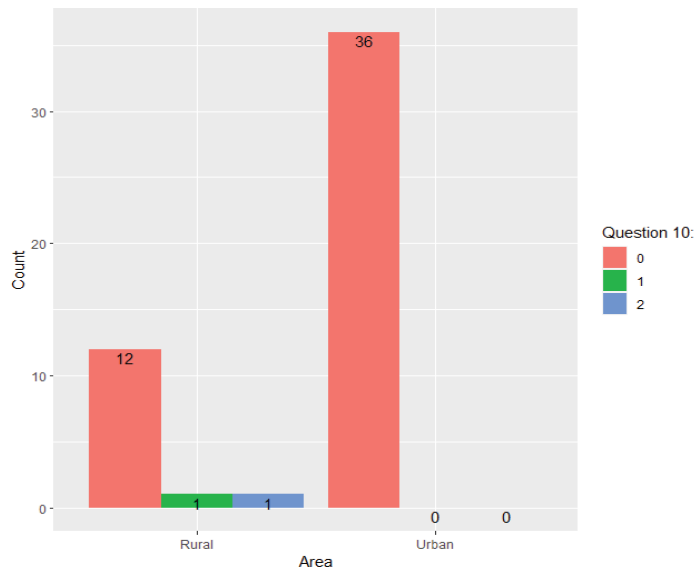


Figure 10. Statistical results for question 10 according to urban and rural environment

DISCUSSIONS

In recent years, there has been a decline in patients' trust in the healthcare system in Romania. This is not only because some dentists may lack the competence and knowledge but because, in many cases, they fail to give time and importance to the relational needs of patients, often downplaying their importance. This is precisely what should be avoided in dental practice, and it can be achieved when dentists are aware of the need for effective communication with patients [16,17].

In the medical field, communication has its own specific characteristics, determined by the needs of patients. Medical professionals must develop a range of relational skills [18].

It is crucial for dentists to realize that most of the time, patients coming to the clinic are unfamiliar with the field, having various concerns and uncertainties. Minimizing the use of specialized terminology will positively influence their anxiety about dental procedures [19,20].

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, there has been a decline in patients' trust in the healthcare system in Romania. This is not only because some dentists may lack the necessary competence and knowledge but also because, in many cases, they fail to address the relational needs of patients, often downplaying their importance. This is precisely what should be avoided in dental practice, and it can be achieved when dentists are aware of the need for effective communication with patients [16,17].

In the medical field, communication has its own specific characteristics, determined by the needs of patients. Medical professionals must develop a range of relational skills [18]. It is crucial for dentists to realize that most of the time, patients coming to the clinic are unfamiliar with the field, having various concerns and uncertainties. Minimizing the use of specialized terminology will positively contribute to the control of their anxiety about dental procedures [19,20].

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