

The Effect of Community-Based Externships on Host Sites: A Survey of Staff Dentists at Washington State Community Clinics

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Background: The purpose of this study was to better understand the attitudes of community health center dentists towards community-based externships and determine if previous experience supervising dental students affected their opinions.

Methods: We contacted 99 dentists in Washington State were contacted and asked them to complete either an internet or mail-out survey. Of the 69 who responded, 45 had experience supervising dental students participating in community-based externships. The survey included questions about the effects of community-based externships on dental students, patients, the clinic, and the dentists themselves. The survey also asked for dentists' opinions about why a clinic would host dental students, who should pay for the program expenses, and what incentives should be given to supervising dentists.

Results: Nearly all respondents (97%) felt that a community-based externship had a positive impact on a student's education. Dentists with experience supervising dental students were more likely to report the program's effects on patients and the quality of care delivered by students as neutral or negative ($p=0.035$ and $p=0.034$, respectively). Ninety-one percent of the respondents did not feel that community-based clinics should pay dental schools when hosting dental students and 56% did not think the clinic should pay for a student's living expenses.

Conclusion: Dentists did not report an increase in overall clinic production when a student was present and did not feel that community-based clinics should pay for participation in community-based externships programs. The most preferred incentive for participation in community-based externships by dentists was free continuing education classes. More efforts should be made to understand the components of quality of care and how best to maintain it in the community-based externship setting.

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