

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Does dentists' fear have an adverse effect on clinical decision-making?

Developed from the original question submitted by D. Andrew Lane, May 2010

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Key Terms

Fear. An unpleasant feeling of anxiety or apprehension caused by the presence or anticipation of danger; worry, as in a concern about something that threatens to bring bad news or results; chance or likelihood of an undesirable thing happening.

Clinical decision-making. The process of making decisions by clinicians, usually in relation to the diagnosis or treatment of individual patients.

Adverse/effect. A harmful or abnormal result.

Defensive clinical practice. The alteration of modes of clinical practice, induced by the threat of liability.

Background

A literature exists about patients' fears of dental treatment¹, and also of dentists' options for clinical management of their patients' fears^{2,3}.

What insight does the literature offer about dentists' own fears? What impact may this have upon professional practice?

'How often does fear affect your clinical decision-making?' 61% of participants (n=62) in a recent member survey⁴ on an online UK private access mailing list for dentists for dental opinion and information⁵ answered 'daily' to this question. Only 14% reported that fear never affected their clinical decision-making.

Dentists' informally-reported fears are diverse (see Fig 1). These fears may be inhibitory to clinical activity, such as a fear of litigation, potentially leading to defensive practice. Conversely, continuous clinical performance improvement may in part be stimulated by dentists' fears. A further dimension that has been reported is that 'we have nothing to fear but fear itself'^{6,7,8,9}.

Aim

This review aimed to use research evidence to construct a comprehensive list of the fears of primary care dentists. In addition, to try to identify research which shows how any dentists' fears impacts upon their clinical decision-making.

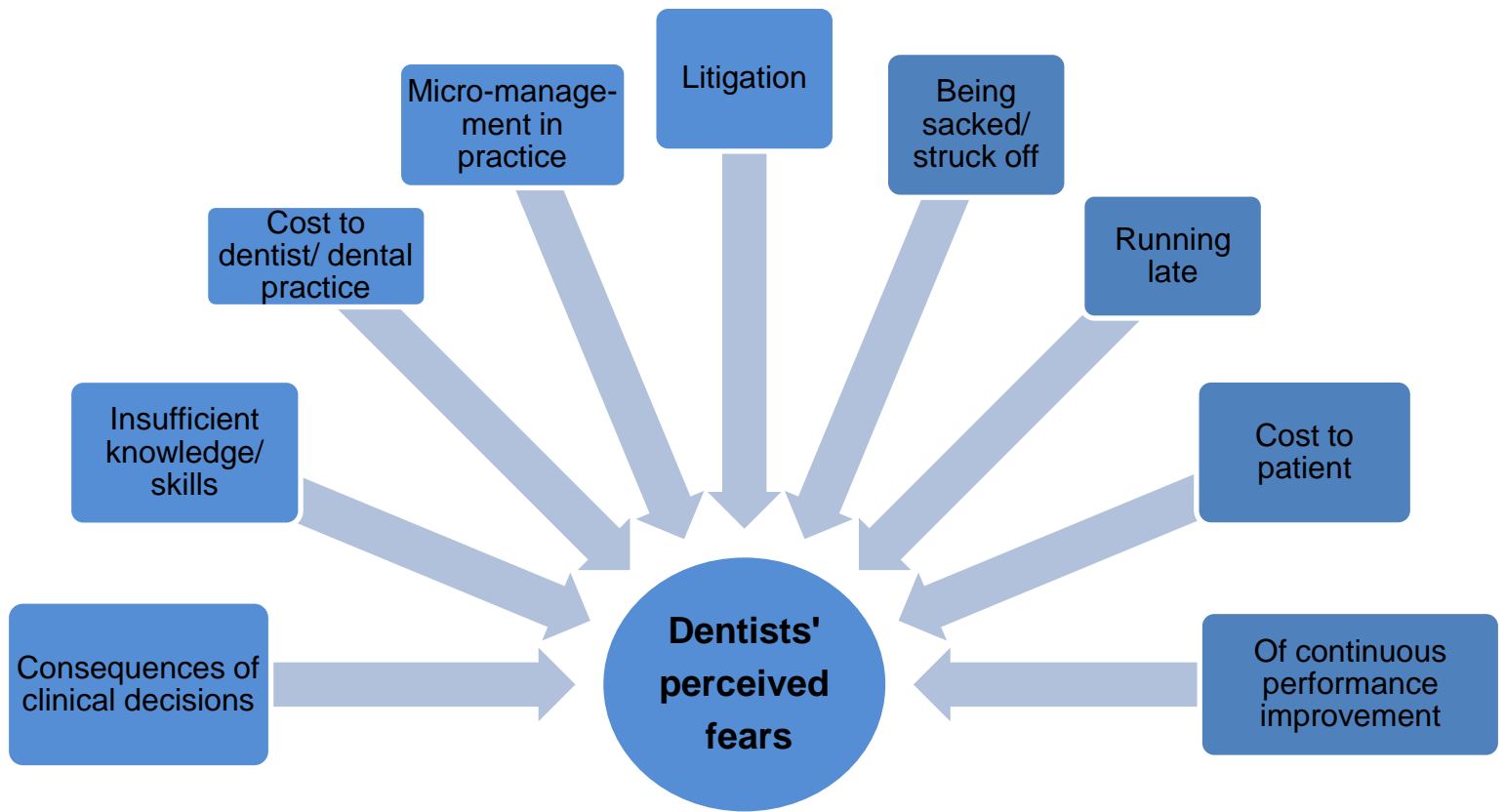
Review Method

Initial search: Ovid MEDLINE ® 1950 to April Week 4 2010 using search terms fear, decision-making, clinical competence, patient care planning, choice behaviour. 69 titles identified, 14 papers retrieved as full text and examined; 69 titles rejected.

Further searches: included CEBD, Cochrane Oral Health Group, CRD, ADA, TRIP database, DARE, NHS Evidence - QIPP, social sciences databases (Science Direct, ASSIA (CSA), Web of Science, EBSCO, SwetsWise), and individual journal searches including EBD, JEBD, JADA. 299 titles identified, 299 titles rejected.

Further contact: made with Dr Andrew Lane, review question originator, to confirm the subject of the question.

Figure One. Fears reported by dentists.
(GDPUK online survey, 2010).



Findings

Three hundred and sixty-eight titles and abstracts arising from the bibliographic and web-based searches were screened. Fourteen potentially-relevant papers were retrieved as full text and reviewed. Ultimately none of these 14 papers provided relevant findings.

We could find no studies that identified the nature and extent of dentists' fears.

Nor could we find any studies that assessed how dentists' own fears impact upon clinical decision-making.

It appears that exploration and understanding of fear amongst dentists, and also the mechanisms and degree to which this may impact upon clinical decision-making, is novel territory for primary research.

References

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