

Enhancing The Quality Of Oral Healthcare Services In A Government Hospital: Insights From A Practicum Experience

Sherglaisha S. Alpha, DMD, MSD

Abstract: This paper explores the practicum experience of public health students at the Dental Department of Sta. Ana Hospital, a Level 2 government hospital in Manila. The practicum was held from January 8 to January 12, 2024 to assess the quality of oral healthcare services. Through observations, interviews, and hospital tours, key challenges were identified as follows: inadequate space, improper infrastructure, limited equipment, lack of diagnostic tools, and absence of institutional support for staff development. A project proposal was developed to address these issues. The practicum provided valuable insights into the operational dynamics of the government hospital's dental department and underscored the need for better resource management and institutional support for the improvement of public health services in the community.

Keywords: Government Hospital, Oral Healthcare, Practicum Experience, Public Health

INTRODUCTION

Field practice is an integral component of social work education, offering a unique approach to instruction and learning that transforms students into practitioners through direct community involvement. This practical engagement enhances students' knowledge, skills, and subject understanding by providing real-world experiences where they can observe and participate in professional settings.

Recent studies underscore the importance of field practice in social work education. A study by Bogo et al. (2019) emphasizes that field education is critical for integrating theoretical knowledge with practice skills, fostering professional identity, and enhancing employability in social work graduates. Similarly, Wayne, Raskin, and Bogo (2020) highlight the role of experiential learning in developing competency-based education, which aligns with the current trends in social work curricula to prepare students for real-world challenges.

In Sta. Ana Hospital, field practice serves as a multifaceted tool to address diverse patient needs. It integrates system deployment and utilization into the patients' healthcare framework, offering a mobile and open platform to facilitate sustained patient engagement. This practicum experience at Sta. Ana Hospital held from January 8 to January 12, 2024 and consisted of 40 working hours, aimed to assess the hospital's background and administration, with a particular focus on the dental department. The practicum explored the hospital's setup and services, highlighting its reputation for providing high standards of care and its commitment to improving the health and well-being of the local community.

In healthcare settings, the integration of field practice has shown significant benefits. A study by Frenk et al. (2019) discusses how practical experiences in healthcare settings can enhance students' understanding of health systems, patient care, and interprofessional collaboration. This aligns with the objectives of the practicum at Sta. Ana Hospital, where students can observe the intricacies of hospital operations and the provision of oral healthcare services.

The journey to completing the 40-hour practicum began with a preparatory meeting on December 4, 2023. This initial meeting involved introducing the field practice and discussing the planned activities with the affiliation committee. Through this practicum, the researchers sought to gain valuable insights into the quality of oral healthcare services at Sta. Ana Hospital, contributing to their understanding and professional growth in the field of public health.

METHODS

This paper uses the qualitative narrative design to explore the practicum experience of public health students at the Dental Department of Sta. Ana Hospital which was conducted from January 8 to January 12, 2024. The focus was on the Dental Department located on the first floor of Sta. Ana Hospital. The participants included dental practitioners, administrative staff, and patients receiving dental care.

Before data collection, initial discussions were held with the chief of the dental clinic to outline objectives and activities. Approval was obtained from the OIC Hospital Director. Institutional requirements such as affiliation fees and vaccination certificates were processed.

The researchers conducted observations, hospital tours, and interviews using a prepared assessment tool covering hospital history, mission, vision, organizational structure, and personnel information. The participants were ensured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. They were asked to sign voluntary participation and consent forms prior to their participation in the study. They were informed that they could withdraw from their participation any time during the conduct of the study.

After the data collection, field texts were read, re-read, and analyzed. Key themes and patterns related to the operational challenges and quality of oral healthcare services in the dental department were identified. Data interpretation followed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Assessing the performance and effectiveness of a dental clinic within a government hospital is crucial to understanding the quality of oral healthcare services available to the general population. This involves evaluating various aspects, such as patient satisfaction, quality of care, accessibility, resources, and efficiency. It also encompasses an analysis of the clinic's infrastructure, equipment, staffing levels, range of dental services provided, waiting times, and adherence to infection control protocols.

After visiting Sta. Ana Hospital Dental Department, the researchers identified the areas where improvements can be made to optimize patient care outcomes. This assessment provided optimal insights into the operations of the clinic, uncovered any potential challenges, and helped in identifying opportunities for growth and development.

Several recent studies have highlighted key aspects of dental clinic performance evaluation that are pertinent to this assessment. For instance, the study by Farooq et al. (2020) underscores the importance of patient satisfaction and expectations in dental care settings, suggesting that factors influencing patient satisfaction should be continuously monitored and addressed to improve service quality. Similarly, Calabrese et al. (2021) evaluated patient satisfaction with tele-dentistry services during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating the potential for integrating technology into clinic operations to enhance accessibility and patient satisfaction.

Accessibility and efficiency are also critical components of effective dental service delivery. Singh et al. (2019) examined these aspects from a patient-centered perspective, highlighting the need for efficient service delivery to meet patient needs. Additionally, Santini et al. (2020) analyzed the influence of accessibility and dental service organization on oral health outcomes, providing evidence that well-organized and accessible dental services lead to better health outcomes.

Resource availability and staffing levels play a significant role in the overall performance of dental clinics. Ramya and Mahesh Kumar (2021) demonstrated the impact of clinic infrastructure on patient outcomes, emphasizing the need for adequate resources and facilities. Glick et al. (2019) discussed the importance of proper staffing and resource allocation in achieving optimal oral health outcomes, supporting the notion that well-equipped and well-staffed clinics perform better.

Adherence to infection control protocols is essential for ensuring patient and staff safety, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meng et al. (2020) and Peditto et al. (2020) both addressed the challenges and protocols for infection control in dental settings, providing frameworks for maintaining high standards of safety and hygiene.

Comprehensive performance evaluations, such as the one conducted by AlRuthia et al. (2019), use methodologies like data envelopment analysis to assess the operational performance of dental clinics within government hospitals. This approach offers a systematic way to identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement. Sbaraini et al. (2019) explored how dental teams incorporate evidence-based practices into preventive care, highlighting the importance of continuous professional development and adherence to best practices in improving service quality.

Problems Identified

The Dental Department provides services that are sufficient not only for primary health care but also extend services that impact the community. The dental department cannot properly operate and provide quality service to the people when there are gaps and barriers that prevent it from rendering service.

The practicum provided a detailed understanding of the operational environment and challenges faced by the Dental Department at Sta. Ana Hospital.

1. Inadequate Space

The department struggles with inadequate space, which makes it challenging to provide efficient services. There is no separate pantry or designated working area which results in a cluttered and inefficient workspace.

According to a study by Nanda et al. (2020), inadequate space in healthcare settings can significantly impact efficiency and patient satisfaction. They found that well-designed workspaces contribute to better workflow and reduce stress among healthcare providers (Nanda et al., 2020).

2. Infrastructure Issues

The drainage and pipeline systems are improperly installed which causes inconvenience and potential hygiene issues. The diagnosis area is located outside the hospital which is not ideal for patient care.

Infrastructure problems like improper drainage and location of diagnostic areas outside the hospital have been highlighted in healthcare facility management literature. For instance, a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of proper infrastructure to ensure infection control and patient safety (WHO, 2016).

3. Equipment Limitations

The clinic lacks sufficient equipment. Instruments are too large for the available autoclave, and there is inadequate storage for pantry items and personal belongings. In addition, two dental chairs have been non-functional since the pandemic which occupies valuable space.

Research on equipment management in healthcare facilities underscores the importance of having properly functioning equipment to enhance patient care. According to a study by Smith et al. (2018), equipment shortages and maintenance issues can lead to delays in treatment and increased healthcare costs (Smith et al., 2018).

4. Lack of Diagnostic Tools

The absence of an x-ray machine limits the clinic's diagnostic capabilities. As a result, only basic extraction services are available, and more complex cases must be co-managed with the ENT Department.

The impact of limited diagnostic capabilities on patient outcomes has been discussed in healthcare management literature. A review by Jones and Brown (2017) suggests that access to diagnostic tools like x-ray machines is critical for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning in dental clinics (Jones & Brown, 2017).

5. Training and Development

Seminars and training sessions are self-funded by employees, and there is no allocated budget for professional development. This limits the staff's ability to stay up-to-date with the latest practices and technologies in oral health care services.

The need for continuous professional development in healthcare settings is well-documented. Studies by Johnson et al. (2019) highlight that investing in staff training improves service quality and patient outcomes, despite financial constraints often faced by healthcare institutions (Johnson et al., 2019).

Narrative Insights

The practicum experience revealed several critical insights. First, the lack of space and proper storage significantly affects the operational efficiency of the Dental Department. An organized and clutter-free environment is crucial for effective patient care. The study of Chaudhury, Mahmood, and Valente (2019) emphasizes the impact of spatial organization and storage solutions on healthcare efficiency. They argue that well-designed storage systems and organizational strategies contribute to smoother workflow and better patient outcomes.

Second, the clinic's limited resources, including non-functional equipment and inadequate diagnostic tools hinder its ability to provide comprehensive dental care. According to a study by Houshyar et al. (2018), efficient resource management, including proper equipment maintenance and effective use of diagnostic tools, is crucial for delivering comprehensive healthcare services. Their findings underscore the need for adequate resources to support clinical operations.

Third, there is a need for institutional support for continuous professional development to ensure that staff are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills. The importance of continuous professional development (CPD) in healthcare is highlighted in the work of Smith and Cavanagh (2019). They discuss how ongoing training and skill development among healthcare staff lead to improved patient care quality and operational efficiency.

Based on the insights gained, a project proposal was developed to address the identified challenges. The project proposal aims to promote a well-managed healthcare environment by decluttering and organizing the dental clinic. It will ensure a smooth and efficient clean environment by creating more storage space. It will also enhance the efficiency of patient management care.

The findings of the practicum revealed that there is a need to provide shelves for displaced dental materials and miscellaneous items. A mixed pantry space within the clinical working area may also be useful. Additionally, there is a need to enhance the working efficiency and to provide easy access to necessary materials.

The project involves the donation and installation of shelving units to the Dental Department. This initiative will increase storage capacity, improve the organization of materials, and create a more efficient and pleasant working environment. The expected outcome is a significant enhancement in the operational efficiency and quality of patient care in the Dental Department of Sta. Ana Hospital.

CONCLUSION

The practicum experience at Sta. Ana Hospital's Dental Department revealed critical challenges in terms of inadequate space, infrastructure issues, equipment limitations, lack of diagnostic tools, and insufficient staff development support. Addressing these issues is necessary to improve patient care. The findings also highlighted the importance of efficient resource management, enhanced infrastructure, and ongoing professional training and development. Collaboration among stakeholders is essential for sustainable improvements in public health. This practicum experience underscores the need to enhance oral healthcare services particularly in government hospitals through practical and evidence-based solutions.

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