

The background of the entire page is a photograph of three students sitting at a long wooden table in a bright, modern classroom or study area. A young woman with long dark hair is in the foreground, leaning over a laptop and looking at a book. Behind her, a young man is smiling and looking towards the camera. To his right, a young woman with blonde hair is also smiling and looking towards the camera. There are several laptops, notebooks, and a water bottle on the table. Large windows in the background let in bright, natural light, creating a warm and positive atmosphere.

fdi  Project
FDI World Dental Federation

Mental Health and
Well-being in Dentistry

STUDENT WELL-BEING POLICIES

Recommendations for improving student well-being
policies based on worldwide student focus groups

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Introduction to student well-being policies

Protecting the mental health and well-being of dental students during their studies is critical for students to feel supported, safe, and able to fulfil their potential. As part of the FDI Mental Health and Well-being in Dentistry project, input from dental students worldwide, including those represented by the International Dental Students Association, the European Dental Students Association, and students from South Africa and South Korea, was used directly to produce 10 global recommendations from FDI through a three-stage approach:



1. Key themes

FDI identified key themes in dental student mental health and well-being that needed investigating and addressing.



2. Focus Groups

Focus groups were arranged in dental student associations and groups worldwide to collect thoughts directly from students.



3. Recommendations

Focus group outputs, especially repeated themes and ideas, were collated and used to develop global recommendations from FDI.

Whilst focus group data will remain anonymous, this document outlines the themes discussed and the resultant recommendations from FDI.

Focus group themes

Focus group covered shared themes to help address specific areas and enable comparison between outputs.

Themes discussed included:

- **Sources of challenges to mental health and well-being**
 - What well-being and mental health mean to dental students
 - The importance of recognizing mental health
 - Assessment of personal mental health and well-being
 - Main factors and stressors affecting students' mental health (including within dental school, personal, and external)
- **Mental health and well-being assessment**
 - Frequency
 - Person in charge
 - Barriers preventing students from opening up about mental health issues
 - Unintended consequences
- **Support: Resources available, needs, and gaps**
 - Awareness of any mental health resources available for dental students
 - Gaps in current support systems for mental health at dental school
 - How dental schools and national dental associations (NDAs) can support dental students

FDI's 10 Recommended Student Well-being Policies

Student concerns and ideas were used directly by FDI to develop 10 global recommendations for improving dental student well-being policies.

Based on the key themes discussed by students, recommendations are grouped into three core categories:



Recommendations for...

Assessing mental health and well-being

Recommendation 1: Implement surveys to identify and address the challenges students face in your specific dental school.



Survey tips:

- Make sure forms are completely anonymised and that the students are reassured of this.
- Communicate key takeaways and follow-up actions with the student body. For example, “Based on survey results, we recognize that X is a challenge and will address it by Y”.

Recommendation 2: Provide regular mental health and well-being assessments.



Assessment tip:

- Regular, non-mandatory assessment of mental health and well-being should be available to all dental students in the form of one-to-one sessions with a mental health expert independent of the dental school.

Recommendations for...

Addressing common challenges

Recommendation 3: Create a teaching plan that is up-to-date, avoids overlapping pressure points in student workload, and encourages a positive work-life balance.

Recommendation 4: Organize social and team-building opportunities for dental students, including with other dental schools.

Student support can be provided in multiple ways. Whilst providing resources and having lectures on mental health and well-being are useful individual actions, the most effective support will be provided by a combination of effective **teaching**, easy-to-use **resources**, and accessible **services**.

Teaching

Recommendation 5: Include mental health and well-being in the university dental curriculum, including stress management training.

Recommendation 6: Provide mental health training for all staff.

Staff mental health training may include:

- *Ensuring staff understand the pressures dental students face and the signs that support is needed.*
- *Educating staff to help recognize and prevent avoidable stressors. Despite best intentions, staff can add to student stress through:
 - *Expecting perfection*
 - *Demanding that their topic is the most important*
 - *Having a mindset that normalizes suffering (“I had to go through this, so you should too”)**
- *Providing access to Mental Health First Aid training.*



Resources

Recommendation 7: Produce and/or share resources and tools to support dental students' mental health, such as the **FDI Dental Student Mental Health and Well-being resources**.

Services

Recommendation 8: Provide and encourage open channels of communication for students to express concerns or well-being challenges to staff and peers.



Peer support group tip:

- Whilst peer support groups should be student-led, dental schools can contribute by ensuring rooms are available and providing access to relevant resources such as FDI's **peer support templates**.

Recommendation 9: Ensure access to counselling and well-being services that provide support for problems both within and outside of dental school.



Counselling and well-being tip:

- Ensure these services are accessible outside of the dental students' working and studying hours.

Recommendation 10: Provide targeted career support to reduce uncertainty and fear for the next steps after qualification.

Summary

“I would like to see FDI act as an external organization guiding views [on mental health] in the system”

Student Focus Group Quote

Dental students' mental health and well-being are critical for their personal and professional development. FDI's 10 Recommended Student Well-being Policies aim to promote a healthy student experience that balances effective teaching with personal well-being.

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