

The Effect of Multimodal Comprehensive Care Methodology Training on Oral Health Care Professionals' Empathy for Patients With Dementia

Masaki Kobayashi (✉ kobayashi@tmcgrc.org)

Department of Geriatric Medicine, National Hospital Organization Tokyo Medical Center, Meguro-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 152-8902 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5567-3788>

Mio Ito

Gunma University Graduate School of Health Science

Yasuyuki Iwasa

Haradoi Hospital

Yoshiko Motohashi

Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital and Institute of Gerontology: Tokyo-to Kenko Choju Iryo Center

Ayako Edahiro

Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital and Institute of Gerontology: Tokyo-to Kenko Choju Iryo Center

Maki Shirobe

Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital and Institute of Gerontology: Tokyo-to Kenko Choju Iryo Center

Hirohiko Hirano

Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital and Institute of Gerontology: Tokyo-to Kenko Choju Iryo Center

Yves Gineste

IGM-France

Miwako Honda

National Hospital Organisation Tokyo Medical Center: Tokyo Iryo Center

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Abstract

Background: The prevalence of oral diseases in people with dementia has increased, and patients with dementia have worse oral health than people without dementia. However, in the provision of oral care, these patients often exhibit care-resistant behaviours. Empathy is important for health care professionals who provide dental care for people with dementia. A study was conducted to assess whether a multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme: Humanitude™ is associated with an improvement in empathy for people with dementia among oral health care professionals.

Methods: This research was a pre-post prospective study. A total of 45 dentists and dental hygienists participated in a 7-hour multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme. Participants' empathy for their patients was evaluated with the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version (JSPE-HP) before the training and one month after the training (primary outcome). Each participant listed 3 patients from his or her clinical practice for whom he or she felt difficulty to provide oral care due to dementia. The oral health of the 3 care-resistant patients listed by each participant was evaluated by the Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT) before the training and one month after the training (secondary outcome).

Results: The post-training response rate was 87% (21 dentists and 18 dental hygienists). From pre-training to post-training, the multimodal comprehensive care methodology training significantly increased the mean empathy score (from 113.97 to 122.95, $P < 0.05$, effect size=0.9). Regardless of gender, profession and years of clinical experience, all post-training subgroup scores were higher than the pre-training subgroup scores. The tongue, natural teeth, and oral hygiene scores of patients, as assessed by the OHAT, were significantly improved compared with those before the training.

Conclusions: Multimodal comprehensive care methodology training was associated with an improvement in oral health professionals' empathy for patients with dementia and an improvement in the oral health of their patients. These findings suggest that randomized controlled trials with large sample sizes will be needed.

Trial registration: UMIN Clinical Trials Registry (UMIN-CTR), UMIN000041687.

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Background

The prevalence of oral diseases in people with dementia has increased, and patients with dementia have worse oral health than people without dementia [1, 2]. Poor oral health can lead to pain, difficulty in food intake, impaired general health and reduced quality of life.

However, patients with dementia often exhibit care-resistant behaviour, as some studies have shown [3, 4]. Care-resistant behaviour refers to actions taken by an older adult to avoid receiving any type of assistance or care activity [5]. Oral health care-resistant behaviour is a fear-evoked response to a caregiver's unintentionally threatening behaviour during oral care. A previous study described the neurobiological principles of threat perception and fear response during oral care in patients with dementia [6]. Another reported the effectiveness of strategies based on the neurobiology of threat perception in preventing and reducing care-resistant behaviours during oral care [7].

Empathy for patients with dementia has been suggested as one of the critical abilities required for health professionals [8]. In the health care setting, empathy can be defined as the ability to understand a patient's experiences and feelings, as well as the ability to communicate this understanding [9, 10]. Therefore, it is important for oral health professionals to understand the concept of care-resistant behaviour and to increase their empathy for people with dementia. However, there is no practical training on caring for patients with dementia for oral health care professionals in Japan.

A French care methodology, namely, a multimodal comprehensive communication technique: Humanitude™, has been widely implemented in hospitals and nursing homes in European countries for 40 years [11]. This methodology is based on a humane philosophy that emphasizes respect for each person's dignity, freedom and autonomy and that is based on the neurological principles of dementia, including the conception of care-resistant behaviour, as shown by a previous study [5]. The education programme focuses on skills for 4 elements of communication with patients: gaze, talk, touch, and assistance with standing up. Additionally, according to the methodology, all care is provided in a sequence consisting of 5 structures: 1) notification, 2) preparation, 3) integration of communication, 4) emotional consolidation, and 5) the next appointment [12].

Past studies have reported web-based empathy interventions in caregivers of people with dementia [13, 14] and dental students [15]. However, no previous study has been conducted on the development of empathy for patients with dementia among oral health care professionals.

We hypothesized that a multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme would promote a positive change in the relationships between oral health care professionals and patients with dementia through increased empathy, as measured using the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version (JSPE-HP) [16]. The aim of this study was to evaluate whether a multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme would be associated with an improvement in oral health care professionals' empathy for patients with dementia. We also examined a secondary outcome, i.e., oral health in patients with dementia, using the Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT) [17].

Methods

Study design, setting, and participants

A pre-post prospective study was conducted. This study adheres to the CONSORT guidelines. Dentists or dental hygienists who had a current active dental practice with people with dementia as patients were recruited through a website for research collaboration in September 2018. The on-site training was held in Fukuoka on November 23, 2018.

Procedure

Each participant listed 3 patients from his or her clinical practice for whom he or she felt difficulty to provide oral care due to dementia. Prior to the training, the participants completed the JSPE-HP, and the OHAT scores for the patients who had difficulty of oral care or dental treatment. A 7-hour multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme was provided. One month after the training, secondary surveys were conducted to obtain the post-intervention JSPE-HP scores and post-intervention OHAT scores of the 3 patients whom each participant listed (Fig. 1).

Instruments

Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version (JSPE-HP)

The JSPE was specifically developed to measure empathy in medical students (Student Version), health professionals (Health Professionals Version) and health profession students (Health Professions Student Version). In this study, the JSPE-HP was chosen. The questionnaire is a 20-item instrument that has been widely used and validated among health professionals and trainees. It uses a 7-point Likert scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” (range: 20–140) [9, 18]. The JSPE has been translated into 25 languages. In this study, the Japanese version of the JSPE, which has been linguistically validated [19], was used. The participants completed the JSPE-HP. The scale was administered before the training (pre-training) and one month later (post-training).

Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT)

The oral health of the identified patients was assessed using the OHAT, an instrument developed specifically for use in residential care facilities [17]. The tool is used to visually evaluate 8 items: the appearance of the lips, tongue, gums and tissues, and saliva; overall oral hygiene; the state of the natural teeth; the condition of dentures; and the presence of pain. The OHAT is composed of 8 items, each of which is assigned a score ranging from 0 (healthy) to 2 (unhealthy). The oral cavities of patients were assessed using the OHAT prior to the study and one month after the intervention. The oral health assessor of each patient was the participant who identified him or her.

Outcome measures

The primary outcome was the difference in the JSPE-HP scores between the training (pre-training) and one month later (post-training). The secondary outcome was the difference in

the OHAT scores between pre-training and post-training.

Multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme

As an intervention, we implemented a French multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme. In 1979, Yves Gineste and Rosette Marescotti developed a multimodal comprehensive care methodology called the Humanitude™ care methodology [11, 12]. Humanitude™ is the set of particularities that allow us to feel that we are members of the human species and to recognize other human beings as members of the same species. Yves Gineste and Rosette Marescotti developed this care methodology based on the considerations of dignity, freedom and autonomy in the daily care provided to dependent and vulnerable persons. The methodology focuses on 4 elements of communication with patients: gaze, talk, touch, and assistance withstanding up. Additionally, all care is provided in a sequence consisting of 5 structures: 1) notification, 2) preparation, 3) integration of communication, 4) emotional consolidation, and 5) the next appointment. The aim of notification is to announce the presence of the caregiver, avoid surprise approaches and respect the patient's privacy and autonomy. Preparation represents the initial establishment of a relationship through the relationship pillars (gaze, speech and touch), and it allows the caregiver to obtain consent for the relationship from the person receiving the care. Integration of communication includes the provision of care with a consistent positive emotional environment between the caregiver and the patient. Emotional consolidation is a stage of cognitive and mental stimulation that leaves a positive impression of the relationship and the care in the emotional memory of the person receiving it, facilitating consent to the relationship and acceptance of future care. The next appointment is the final moment of the relationship, in which commitment to future care is affirmed. At this stage, goodbyes are said, and a new meeting is scheduled, which prevents a feeling of abandonment [11]. The programme administered in the current study consisted of training participants in skills that can be used in dental care using the multimodal comprehensive care methodology. The training was performed by a certified instructor. The instructor provided lectures, demonstrations and role-play workshops to teach the participants how to adapt the methodology to patients who refused dental care.

Statistical analysis

The normal distribution of all data was verified by the Shapiro-Wilk test. A paired-samples t-test was used to test for significant differences between the pre-training and post-training JSPE-HP scores. The Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to test for significant differences in the categories of the OHAT scores. The magnitudes of changes in the JSPE-HP score variables were computed as standardized mean differences (Cohen's *d* measure of effect size), which express changes in standard deviation units. Values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 have been suggested as indicating small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively [20]. The internal consistency reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. These analyses were performed using R statistical software (version 3.5.3). Statistical significance was defined as a *P*-value < 0.05.

Results

A total of 45 participants, including 26 dentists and 19 dental hygienists, were enrolled in the study to complete the multimodal comprehensive care methodology training programme. Prior to the training, the information on 132 patients who had difficulty of oral care or dental treatment whom each participant listed was obtained.

Comparison of Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE) scores

For the 45 participants, the post-training response rate was 87% (27 females and 12 males, 21 dentists and 18 dental hygienists). According to Gough and Hall, a response rate of at least 75% should be achieved to ensure the representativeness of the sample for surveys mailed to professionals [21].

The distribution of the participants and the results of the pre-training and the post-training JSPE scores are shown in Table 1. The JSPE-HP scores showed a statistically significant improvement (from 113.97 to 122.95, $P < 0.05$) from pre-training to post-training. The standardized effect size for these mean differences was large (effect size 0.9). Higher scores were observed regardless of gender, profession, and years of clinical experience. In particular, there were significant improvements in empathy among females, dentists, dental hygienists, participants with 11–20 years of experience, and participants with 21–30 years of experience ($P < 0.05$). Based on the Cronbach's alpha, the internal consistency reliability was 0.61.

Table 1
Pre-training and post-training results of the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy

		Mean Score (95% CI)		P-value ^a	Standardized Mean Difference in Change
		Pre-intervention	Post-intervention		
Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy: Total Empathy	N = 39	113.97(103.84 to 124.1)	122.95(119.77 to 126.12)	P < 0.001	0.90
Male	N = 12	115.50(103.05 to 127.95)	121.75(111.37 to 132.13)	0.07	0.55
Female	N = 27	113.30(104.19 to 122.41)	123.48(113.8 to 133.16)	P < 0.001	1.10
Dentist	N = 21	114.76(102.55 to 126.97)	122.86(112.32 to 133.4)	0.009	0.73
Dental hygienist	N = 18	113.06(105.81 to 120.31)	123.06(113.9 to 132.22)	0.001	1.25
-10	N = 4	102(96.9 to 107.1)	125(113.62 to 136.38)	0.07	2.61
11–20	N = 15	114.67(103.21 to 126.13)	125.07(114.11 to 136.03)	0.002	0.96
21–30	N = 15	115.47(107.03 to 122.91)	120.73(111.69 to 129.77)	0.03	0.66
31-	N = 5	117(105.53 to 128.47)	121.6(115.74 to 127.46)	0.49	0.51
^a Paired-samples t-test					

The bold numbers are significant *P*-values ($p < 0.05$)

Comparison of Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT) scores

Among the 132 patients, the post-training response rate was 73% (96 patients). In the second OHAT survey, participants were excluded due to the following: missing data, hospital admission, death, and no diagnosis of dementia. Seventy-one patients were assessed after these adjustments. The characteristics of the 71 patients are described in Table 2. Fifty-three (74.6%) patients were women, 27 (38.0%) were 75–84 years old, and 40 (56.3%) were over 85 years old. The most common cause of dementia was

Alzheimer's disease (n = 41, 57.7%). The results of the pre-training and post-training OHAT scores are shown in Table 3. There were significant improvements in the tongue (from 0.80 to 0.59, $P < 0.05$), natural teeth (from 1.41 to 1.32, $P < 0.05$), and oral hygiene (from 1.44 to 1.15, $P < 0.05$) scores.

Table 2
Patient characteristics

	Patients (<i>n</i> = 71)
Age, <i>n</i> (%)	
65–74 years	4 (6.0)
75–84 years	27 (38.0)
≥ 85 years	40 (56.3)
Women, <i>n</i> (%)	53 (74.6)
Aetiology of dementia, <i>n</i> (%)	
Alzheimer's disease	41 (57.7)
Lewy body dementia	7 (9.9)
Vascular dementia	5 (7.0)
Other type of dementia	4 (5.6)
Dementia with undetermined aetiology	14 (19.7)

Table 3
Mean pre-training and post-training Oral Health Assessment
Tool scores

Category	Pre-training	Post-training	<i>P</i> -value
Lips	0.55	0.54	0.88 ^a
Tongue	0.80	0.59	0.04^a
Gums and tissues	0.86	0.80	0.64 ^a
Saliva	0.66	0.59	0.48 ^a
Natural teeth	1.41 (n = 63)	1.32 (n = 63)	0.02^a
Dentures	0.81 (n = 31)	0.80 (n = 30)	0.94 ^a
Oral hygiene	1.44	1.15	0.01^a
Dental pain	0.70	0.59	0.36 ^a
^a Wilcoxon signed rank test			

The bold numbers are significant *P*-values ($p < 0.05$)

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the multimodal comprehensive care methodology training for oral health care professionals improved their empathy for patients with dementia.

This study is the first to investigate the development of empathy for patients with dementia among oral health care professionals. Previous studies demonstrated that web-based interventions improved informal caregivers' empathy for patients with dementia [13, 14]. However, informal caregivers are generally not involved in dental care and treatment. Other studies demonstrated that completing a person-centred course and adding patient videos to a lecture improved dental students' empathy [22, 23]. Although many clinical studies have been conducted on empathy interventions, the majority of such interventions have targeted students and residents [24]. Therefore, our intervention aimed to improve the empathy of health care professionals. Considering the importance of the clinical impact on reducing the care-resistant behaviour of patients with dementia and improving communication skills in the relationship between oral health care professionals and patients during oral care or treatment, further studies are needed to improve oral health care professionals' empathy for patients with dementia.

Another strength of this study was the post-training improvement in the oral health of patients who refused care. The improvements in the tongue and oral hygiene scores may suggest an enhanced quality of oral health care, as previous studies have shown [25].

The health of natural teeth cannot be improved only through the enhancement of the quality of oral health care. Therefore, the improvements in natural teeth scores observed in this study may have occurred because dental treatments, such as the treatment of dental caries, were performed post-training, as dentists participated more than dental hygienists in this study. As shown in previous studies, this multimodal comprehensive care methodology training for oral health care professionals based on the neurobiological factors of oral health care-resistant behaviour might have decreased oral health care-resistant behaviour; as a result, the training might have helped improve the quality of oral health care [6, 7]. The improvement in participants' empathy also might have decreased the oral health care resistance behaviour of the identified patients who had previously refused oral health care. However, since it was difficult to prove these causal relationships in this study, further studies are needed.

We believe that there are two reasons why the multimodal comprehensive care methodology training improved the empathy of oral health care professionals. First, this methodology emphasizes both verbal and non-verbal communication skills for both caregivers and care receivers. Past studies have shown that interventions based on the neurobiology of oral care-resistant behaviour also target both verbal and non-verbal communication skills [6, 7]. Second, this methodology training focuses on not only lectures about dementia-related knowledge and care but also specific practical care strategies based on a humane philosophy and neurological theory of dementia. Interventions that focus more on enhancing dementia-related knowledge and care through lectures might lead to more negative attitudes towards people with dementia [13]. It has been proposed that interventions related to people with dementia should be designed so that caregivers feel a sense of competence and perceive that their knowledge and skills related to caring for people with dementia are growing rather than focusing on increasing dementia-related knowledge [26].

Our study showed that regardless of gender and years of clinical experience, all post-training subgroup scores were higher than the pre-training subgroup scores. However, there was no statistically significance in some subgroups; male, years of experience less than 10 and more than 31. The present results suggest that multimodal comprehensive care methodology training may improve empathy regardless of the number of years of clinical experience. Further studies with larger samples are needed to clarify this association.

Several limitations should be discussed. First, this study was a pre-post prospective study, not a randomized controlled trial. Therefore, it is possible that confounding factors influenced the association between the training and the JSPE-HP and OHAT scores. Second, the sample size of this study was small. Third, measurements of empathy in a medical population may be subject to significant social desirability bias; therefore, particularly with self-report measures of empathy, it can be difficult to assert whether training or awareness of the desirability of an empathetic physician increases empathy [24]. Self-

report surveys can be an effective and reliable measure of physician empathy, but they must be validated against behavioural or patient-report measures. Fourth, the internal consistency reliability of the JSPE scores was low. It could be related to small sample size and following study with large numbers of participants is needed. Fifth, the outcome assessment time frame in this study might be a weakness with respect to assessing empathy. While health professionals' empathy may significantly increase immediately after training, there are limited insights about the long-term efficacy of the training [24].

Conclusions

This study is the first to assess the effectiveness of multimodal comprehensive care methodology training in improving the empathy of oral health care professionals. The multimodal comprehensive care methodology training was associated with an improvement in oral health care professionals' empathy for patients with dementia and an improvement in the oral health of their patients. Because this was a pre-post study, the findings suggest that randomized controlled trials with large sample sizes will be needed.

Abbreviations

JSPE-HP

Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version

OHAT

Oral Health Assessment Tool

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. This research was approved by the Medical Ethical Committee of Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital. This research was conducted in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines for Epidemiological Research in Japan and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used during the current study are available from the Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital, but restrictions apply to the availability of these data and are not publicly available. Data are however available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with permission of Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions

All authors conceived and designed this study. MK, MI, YI, YM, AE, MS, HH, and MH collected and analysed the data. MK wrote the draft of the main paper. MK and MH discussed the results and interpretations and were involved in the critical revisions of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Authors' information

Department of Geriatric Medicine, National Hospital Organization Tokyo Medical Center, 2-5-1, Higashigaoka, Meguro-ku, Tokyo, 152-8902, Japan

Masaki Kobayashi, Miwako Honda, Yves Gineste

Department of Geriatric Nursing, Gunma University Graduate School of Health Sciences, 3-39-22, Shouwa-machi, Maebashi-city, Gunma, 371-8514, Japan

Mio Ito

Department of Dentistry, Haradoi Hospital, 6-40-8, Aoba, Higashi-ku, Fukuoka-city, Fukuoka, 813-8588, Japan

Yasuyuki Iwasa

Research Team of Promoting Independence and Mental Health, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology, 35-2, Sakaecho, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo, 173-0015, Japan

Yoshiko Motohashi

Research Team of Promoting Independence and Mental Health, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology, 35-2, Sakaecho, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo, 173-0015, Japan

Ayako Edahiro

The Tokyo Metropolitan Support Center for Promotion of Preventive Care, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology, 35-2, Sakaecho, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo, 173-0015, Japan

Maki Shirobe

Department of Oral Surgery and Dentistry, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology, 35-2, Sakaecho, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo, 173-0015, Japan

Hirohiko Hirano

IGM-France, Saint-Laurent-de-la-Salanque, France, 66250

Yves Gineste

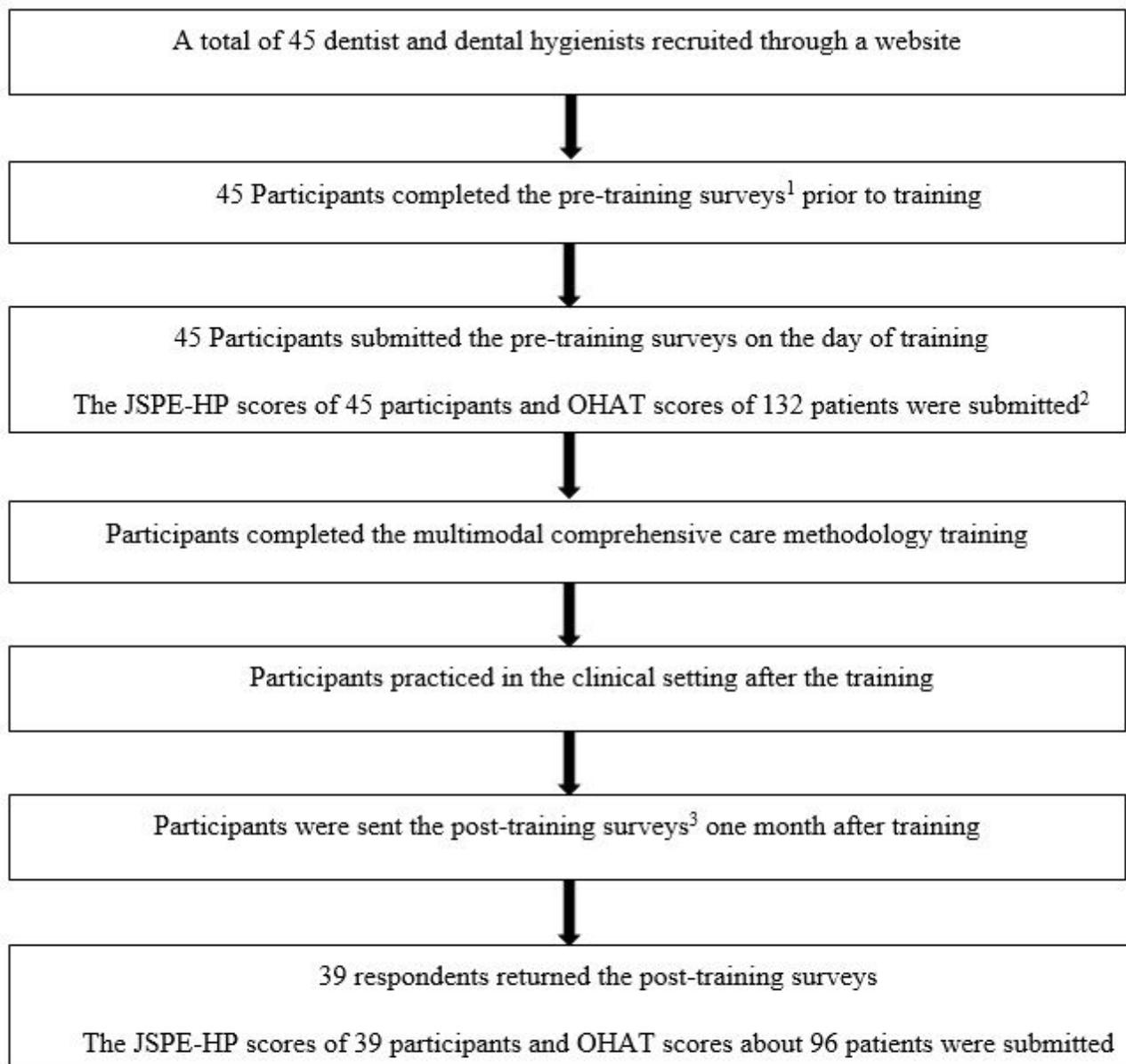
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Figures



1: Pre-training surveys: completion of the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version (JSPE-HP) and Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT) scores for 3 patients prior to training

2: One participant could not submit information about patients.

3: Post-training surveys: completion of the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy-Health Professionals Version (JSPE-HP) and Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT) scores for 3 patients one month after training

Figure 1

Supplementary Files

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