

# IMPACT OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH REFLECTION

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## INTRODUCTION

My time as the Co-President for the Student Community Outreach for Public Education, or SCOPE, has been instrumental in my dental school experience. Our goal is to empower students as dental educators within their community. SCOPE provides disease prevention, oral health education, screening and preventative dental services to underserved members of the San Francisco Bay Area. Not only are we aiming to support those in our community, but we are empowering students as they grow to become effective dental educators and providers. Community outreach is extremely important in dental school education as it allows students to engage with their local community and understand the impact their education has beyond the four walls of school.

To determine the effectiveness of community outreach in students' experiences, it is essential that students submit reflections on their experiences. Dental schools are aware of the ways in which volunteerism can have a profound effect on students' empathy which can greatly influence their treatment of patients. Written reflections can help the students examine the positive effect of working in the community, and also provide the administration with a summary of each student's experience. There is limited research on the impact of reflective writing on dental student empathy levels. This paper aims to gather reflective data from dental students and evaluate the impact community health has had on their dental school career.



## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this paper is to explore the value of dental student "qualitative data" through reflections of community health projects. This information will enable us to evaluate the design, strategic assessment, and evolution of community oral health projects and programs at the UOP Dental school. We want to highlight students' experiences in community outreach and how it has played an integral role in their dental school career.



## METHODS

Using key words such as community outreach, service, empathy, reflective writing, and health reflections in PubMed and Google Scholar search engines, a pertinent literature was obtained. Eight articles were collected, and the search was run with no language, place, or time restrictions. Participants in the study were third year dental students who were actively involved in community health projects at UOP Dental school. These participants were asked the question "How have community health projects and volunteerism shaped your dental school career?"



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## FINDINGS

My participation in community health and global health at the University of the Pacific has been a cornerstone in my dental education. It is the community patient care and experience that shines light on the real meaning of dentistry and leading in dentistry. In the heart of San Francisco we have unique experiences that few other schools can replicate. It was through these experiences I could truly see the barriers to care and their consequences. We felt the financial, cultural, and educational walls for the environments we were in. We were then able to work on those barriers in controlled environments. Ask any student who has participated in an extramural rotation or a SCOPE event, there will be a patient or an experience they will never forget. These opportunities are defining moments in developing humanism in my colleagues and a reminder that the work we do has a greater impact than we can imagine.

-Alysia Mascolo, DDS 2020

I always find myself involved in community dental outreach events. It reminds me that dental education is not confined within the walls of the dental school, but truly ensued from the community. It was my time away from school; to remind myself that Dentistry is not just about studying theory from books & perfecting preps; but primarily it's a people care oriented profession. Having been a practicing dentist, I know that many dentists will find themselves busy with their practice, and seldom find some time out of their busy routine to get involved with the community. Only the sense of togetherness, service and empathy in us can bring all those dentists back into the community, and nothing else can serve the cause better than SCOPE in showing young dental students the purpose of community outreach projects and events. As a UOP Student, and soon Alumni, I will continue to be active and serve the community through future opportunities combined with our 'Head, Heart & Hands' theme of life being inculcated here at the UOP.

-Vishnu Nandan, IDS 2020

Community outreach has played a key role in my dental education. It helped me to understand the true value of our dental education and what we as future dentists have to offer. It opened my eyes to local communities we may be treating and changed my mindset on how I perceive public oral health. I especially find value in our focus on local communities, understanding that we did not need to travel far to find patients in need of dental care and education. My experiences in community dentistry took me out of my comfort zone in the best way possible. It has made me adaptable in varying environments by working with the resources available to provide the highest standard of care. These interactions have taught me the value of dental education and how rewarding it is to make a difference in someone's oral health.

-Lisa Carrington, DDS 2020

## CONCLUSION

Reflective capacity is an essential characteristic of professionally competent clinical practice. There has been an increase of reflective writing pedagogy within dental education to foster development of students' reflective capacity and cultivate empathy to promote patients' well-being. Reflections are a critical component of the dental school competencies and inform the "Head, Heart and Hands" curriculum design. The value of dental student "qualitative data" through reflections on community health projections are essential to evolve programs and meet professional development needs of dental students. Analyses of these reflections by faculty advisors and directors of community health programs provides data to make policy and programmatic didactic and clinical recommendations. This information can also further help establish a format and system for organizations (such as SCOPE) to create a standard system in which to collect and review student reflections on community health projects.



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