

# Navigating the Challenges of Dentistry in Pakistan

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The dental landscape in Pakistan is full of challenges that impede the delivery of quality oral healthcare. While discussing these problems, it's crucial to acknowledge the hurdles and suggest a way forward. The challenges in dental education and dentistry include inadequate infrastructure and access, confidence crisis of dental graduates, technological lag, lack of community awareness, and lack of robust checks and balances on standards.<sup>1</sup>

Dental institutions and healthcare facilities, particularly in rural and remote areas, often face inadequate infrastructure, outdated equipment, and limited resources, adversely affecting the quality and effectiveness of dental care.<sup>2</sup> This problem is exacerbated by a shortage of qualified dental professionals, as many prefer urban centres offering better facilities and career opportunities. Consequently, large population remain underserved, facing delayed diagnoses, limited treatment options, and poorer oral health outcomes, thereby widening the gap between urban and rural dental services.<sup>3</sup>

A concerning trend has emerged in dental education, with many graduates demonstrating a lack of confidence in their diagnostic abilities and clinical decision-making skills.<sup>4</sup> This issue largely arises from inadequate clinical exposure during training, limited patient contact, and insufficient opportunities for supervised hands-on practice. Additionally, gaps in structured mentorship and practical skill reinforcement further hinder the development of clinical competence, leaving graduates feeling unprepared to independently assess, diagnose, and manage patients effectively upon entering professional practice.<sup>5</sup>

Pakistani dentists are increasingly challenged to keep pace with rapid technological advancements in dentistry. The slow adoption of digital and advanced dental technologies including lasers, regenerative procedures, modern implants, and biocompatible materials is mainly due to limited training, high costs, and weak institutional support.<sup>6,7</sup> Consequently, many dentists struggle to adopt these technologies, leaving the profession less efficient, precise, and competitive internationally.

One of the main challenges to improve oral health in Pakistan is the low awareness of public towards proper dental care. Many individuals neglect preventive practices like brushing, flossing, and regular check-ups. This carelessness leads to missing of early signs of disease, understanding the consequences of untreated conditions, and seeking timely treatment.<sup>8</sup> As a result, minor issues often escalate into serious complications, including tooth decay, gum disease, and tooth loss, which could have been prevented with simple, routine interventions. The lack of public awareness also increases the burden on dental professionals and the healthcare system.<sup>9</sup>

Dental education and clinical practice in Pakistan require strong standardization to ensure safe, effective, and ethical oral healthcare.<sup>10</sup> Uniform curricula, accredited training, and competency-based assessments are essential for producing clinically competent and professional graduates.<sup>11</sup> Regulatory bodies such as PMDC must enforce evidence-based standards, monitor institutions, and ensure practitioner accountability through licensing and continuing professional development. Strong regulation safeguards patient welfare, builds public trust, and enhances the quality and credibility of dental education and practice in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

To address these challenges, policymakers, dental professionals, academic institutions, and relevant stakeholders must work collaboratively to strengthen the oral healthcare system. Priority should be given to investment in modern dental infrastructure, advanced clinical facilities, and the integration of contemporary technologies, alongside the implementation of comprehensive public oral health awareness campaigns that emphasize prevention, early diagnosis, and routine community-based care. Dental curricula should be regularly reviewed and updated to focus on hands-on clinical training, confidence-building, evidence-based practice, and exposure to emerging technologies, ensuring graduates are well prepared for real-world clinical demands. Furthermore, strengthening regulatory frameworks, accreditation standards, and continuous professional development programs will help maintain quality, ethical practice, patient safety, and accountability.<sup>13</sup>

Collectively, these measures can lead to sustainable improvements in oral healthcare delivery, enhance public awareness and trust, elevate the standard of dentistry in Pakistan, improve oral health outcomes, and produce competent, confident, and socially responsible dental professionals.

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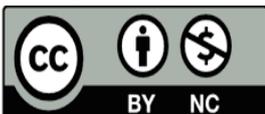
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