

# Emotional intelligence trumps IQ in dentist-patient relationship, study finds

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IQ directly relates to how students perform on tests in the first two years of dental school. But emotional intelligence (EI) trumps IQ in how well dental students work with patients, report researchers from Case Western Reserve University's School of Dental Medicine and Weatherhead School of Management.

EI influences how well [dental students](#) recognize and manage their emotions and professional relationships, explain Kristin Victoroff, DDS, PhD, and Richard Boyatzis, PhD, in the current issue of the *Journal of Dental Education* article, "What is the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and [Dental School](#) Clinical Performance?"

EI differs from IQ, which measures the ability to think and perform on tests. EI, also a form of intelligence, is the ability to read one's own moods and those of others, remain calm under pressure and be optimistic and adaptable to change.

"[Emotional intelligence](#) is distinct from traditional intelligence or IQ," said Boyatzis, a Distinguished University Professor and professor of organizational behavior, psychology and cognitive science. He developed the EI management model and coauthored a book series on how to use it in business. He added that people need both to be successful.

The study evolved from discussions by health-care educators about whether EI should be used in the admissions process or as a measure in clinical practice.

Boyatzis explained that other standardized admissions tests are equally incapable of predicting success in other fields, like medicine, management, and other fields. "Such tests predict grades in courses but not effectiveness in professions. This is the first test of this relationship in dentistry, and one of the clearest studies of the dynamics," he said.

Until now, no evidence was available to determine if EI had a connection to [clinical education](#), said Victoroff, the associate dean for education and associate professor of community dentistry.

The highly competitive admission process to dental school involves high scores on academic and perceptual ability tests. But that could change as educators understand the important role of EI in patient care.

Educators questioned why some high-performing students in the classroom didn't fare as well in the clinic. Researchers wondered if EI was a factor.

Students at Case Western Reserve dental school were among the first in dentistry to see if EI impacted clinical successes, as it does in corporate management.

The researchers recruited third- and fourth-year students, who receive clinical training under the guidance of two preceptors (part-time faculty who are practicing community dentists) that assess clinical performance.

One hundred of the 136 students from the two classes participated. Students themselves plus other individuals they work with were asked to complete a 72-item questionnaire from the Emotional Competence Inventory-University. EI competencies are grouped in four areas: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship management.

Overall clinical performance was determined by averaging the preceptors' assessments of a student's overall clinical performance over several rating periods.

In determining a student's overall clinical performance, preceptors consider such factors as diagnosis and treatment planning skills, work ethic and time utilization, preparation and organization, professionalism, patient management, knowledge and technical skills and ability to self-assess one's work.

The analysis looked at the clinical grade and the EI assessment to see if there was a correlation between high EI scores and high clinical performance. The researchers ruled out the student's year in school and gender in the analysis after finding those factors made no significant differences.

Their findings showed that a high EI related to excellent clinical performance. The researchers found EI skills in self-management were significant predictors of clinical grades. Self-management skills involve self-control, achievement orientation, initiative, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability and optimism.

They did not find a strong EI-clinical association to self- and social-awareness.

EI scores for relationship management, which relates to the ability to influence others, were harder to determine due to the transient nature between the student dentist and patient during the two-year clinical training.

The researchers concluded that teaching EI competencies could better serve patients and help students succeed. They recommended future studies extend EI assessments to practicing dentists to determine EI's

impact in the professional

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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