

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE DENTAL CARE IN CYPRUS: DENTISTS' OPINION

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Abstract

Objective: To investigate the views of dentists of both public and private sectors about the impact of economic crisis in the provision of dental care and the dental profession in Cyprus.

Method: A cross-sectional study was conducted with the use of a questionnaire, specially designed after extensive literature review. The questionnaire was distributed via email to a sample of 300 dentists, randomly selected from the public and private sector. The response rate was 51%, since 153 completed questionnaires were returned, 129 coming from the private sector and 24 from the public sector.

Results: Forty-seven point seven percent (n=61) of the dentists in the private sector stated that in 2013, the daily number of their patients decreased compared to previous years, and 40.6% (n=52) stated that the figures remained stable. In contrast, 75% (n=18) of the dentists in the public sector stated that the number increased and 16.7% (n=4) that it remained stable (p<0.001). There was a negative correlation between the years of service and the daily number of patients (rs= -0.46, p<0.001). Private dentists also stated that there was a reduction in the demand for high cost dental treatments such as prosthetic and orthodontic works and implants. As a result of these aforementioned reductions, 81.3% (n=104) of private dentists stated that their income decreased in 2013 compared to the past. The decline in income was a source of anxiety for both the dentists in the private sector (71.3%) and in the public sector (75%). Sixty-eight point four (n=13) of the dentists in the public sector felt adequate or moderate level of stress by the increasing number of the patients. Both groups of dentists stated that their patients in 2013 were usually visiting the dentist for emergency dental problems, while 49.2% (n=61) of the private dentists declared that the reason of visiting a dentist has changed compared to the past. Finally, 51.2% (n=66) of private dentists reported that the quality of services provided in 2013 was better compared to the past, while the corresponding figure for the dentists of the public sector was 25.1% (n=6) (p=0.038).

Conclusions: The findings indicate that the economic crisis has already a negative impact on the dental care in Cyprus, which is mostly provided by the private sector, as evident by reduced frequency of visits, visits only for emergency problems and selection of more economic treatments. Appropriate measures should be taken in order to avoid the negative consequences on citizens' oral health.

Keywords: economic crisis, dental care, dentists, Cyprus