

## **ABSTRACT**

Dental professionals in the Netherlands seem to play a minor role in the delivery of smoking cessation interventions. This is remarkable, considering the fact that smoking severely damages oral health. The dental hygienist is well suited to play an active role in delivering smoking cessation interventions. Numerous studies have been conducted on interventions in the dental practice; many of which studied the role of the dental hygienist. European consensus exists regarding smoking cessation in dental settings. However, this has not yet been formalised in the Netherlands. In order to successfully implement a policy which aims to increase dental hygienists' intervention activities to reduce the number of smokers, information is needed about their current role and the factors that influence this behavior. Therefore, the central question in this study was: 'What role do dental hygienists play in the discouragement of tobacco use?'

The study used a conceptual model, which is based on Icek Ajzen's theory of reasoned action. The conceptual model assumes that behavior is determined by three factors: the attitude toward the behavior, the subjective norm and self-efficacy. In addition, there may be several barriers that hinder the actual behavior. To answer the central question, an empirical study was conducted. A questionnaire, consisting of 51 items, was sent to 249 dental hygienists. The response rate was 58 percent.

The results show that attitude, as well as self-efficacy and the subjective norm correlate significantly with smoking cessation behavior. However, a regression analysis shows that in a model which comprises all three factors, only attitude makes a significant contribution to predicting the behavior. In an additional regression analysis, which included 'perceived behavioral control' (PBC) (comprising of both the self-efficacy items and the potential barriers), PBC significantly added to the prediction of behavior. However, attitude was still the strongest predictor.

The study's overall findings suggest that most hygienists have a positive attitude toward smoking cessation. This attitude is the most important predictor of their behavior. Other factors seem to be of limited importance. The hygienists' behavior is somewhat ambivalent though: they talk about the subject and advise smokers to quit, but don't offer any actual support. This is a missed opportunity; the chances of quitting successfully without help are hardly worth mentioning.