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## Evaluating the Impact of Dentists on Preventive Oral Healthcare and Community Well-Being: A Systematic Review

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### Abstract

*Preventive oral healthcare is a critical component of public health, and dentists play a central role in reducing the global burden of dental diseases and enhancing community well-being. This systematic review examines evidence from 2016 to 2025 to evaluate the impact of dentist-led preventive interventions across clinical, educational, community, and system-level domains. Findings demonstrate that preventive dental services—including fluoride varnish, sealants, and early diagnostic screenings—significantly decrease caries incidence, periodontal disease progression, and tooth loss. Dentist-delivered education and behavioral counseling were found to improve oral hygiene practices, dietary choices, and oral health literacy, contributing to sustainable long-term health behaviors. Community-based programs and outreach initiatives led by dentists increased access to preventive care, particularly among underserved populations, while interdisciplinary collaborations and innovations such as teledentistry enhanced early detection of oral and systemic conditions. Collectively, the evidence shows that dentists contribute not only to improved oral health outcomes but also to broader community well-being through enhanced quality of life, reduced healthcare costs, and strengthened public health systems. Despite progress, disparities in access and long-term outcome data remain areas requiring further attention. Strengthening preventive dentistry is essential for promoting equitable and sustainable community health.*

**Keywords:** Preventive Oral Healthcare, Dentists, Community Well-Being, Oral Health Literacy, Caries Prevention, Teledentistry, Public Health Dentistry.

### Introduction

Oral health is a fundamental component of general well-being, directly influencing quality of life, nutritional status, social functioning, and systemic health. Dentists play a pivotal role in the identification, prevention, and management of oral diseases, particularly dental caries and periodontal disease, which remain the most prevalent non-communicable diseases globally (Peres et al., 2019). Preventive oral healthcare—encompassing early diagnosis, patient education, fluoride therapy, sealants, regular checkups, and lifestyle counseling—has become a central focus of contemporary dental practice. As public health systems increasingly emphasize prevention over treatment, dentists serve not only as clinicians but also as educators, community advocates, and key contributors to disease surveillance and health promotion.

Globally, dental caries affects an estimated 3.5 billion individuals, with untreated caries in permanent teeth remaining the most common health condition worldwide (Kassebaum et al.,

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2017). The burden of periodontal disease is similarly significant, impacting nearly 50% of adults over the age of 30 (Tonetti et al., 2017). These diseases are largely preventable, yet continue to impose substantial economic, social, and health burdens. Dentists' preventive interventions have been associated with reduced disease incidence, improved oral hygiene behaviors, and enhanced population health outcomes. For instance, evidence shows that regular dental visits reduce the progression of caries and periodontal disease by enabling early detection and timely treatment (Wang et al., 2020).

In community settings, dentists contribute to public health efforts through school-based programs, community outreach, fluoridation advocacy, and the integration of oral health education into primary care. These initiatives have demonstrated measurable reductions in caries prevalence among children and improved oral health literacy among adults (Wright et al., 2016). As oral health becomes increasingly recognized as interconnected with chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disorders, dentists' preventive roles extend beyond the mouth, contributing to broader community well-being and healthcare efficiency.

Despite these contributions, variations exist in the implementation and effectiveness of preventive practices across healthcare systems, socioeconomic groups, and geographic regions. Barriers such as limited access to care, workforce shortages, and disparities in oral health literacy continue to influence the overall impact of dentists on community well-being. Therefore, synthesizing current evidence is essential to understand the full scope, effectiveness, and challenges of dentist-led preventive care.

This systematic review aims to evaluate the impact of dentists on preventive oral healthcare and community well-being by examining clinical outcomes, educational interventions, community-based programs, and system-level contributions. The review also identifies gaps in the literature to guide future research and inform policy decisions.

## 2. Methodology

This systematic review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility. The review aimed to synthesize evidence on the impact of dentists on preventive oral healthcare and community well-being across diverse populations and healthcare systems.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across major scholarly databases, including **PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, and Google Scholar**. The search covered studies published between **2016 and 2025** to capture contemporary evidence on preventive dental practices. Keywords and Boolean operators included: \**“dentist”*, “preventive oral healthcare”, “oral health promotion”, “community well-being”, “dental public health”, “preventive dentistry”, “oral health education”, “dental interventions”, “community oral programs”\*\*. Grey literature such as government reports, WHO publications, and professional dental association documents was also screened.

### Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed studies published in English.
- Studies assessing dentist-led preventive interventions or community oral health programs.
- Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs.

- Outcomes relating to oral disease prevention, oral health literacy, patient behavior, or community health indicators.

**Exclusion criteria:**

- Studies unrelated to preventive oral healthcare.
- Non-dentist-led interventions (unless dentists played a primary role).
- Editorials, commentaries, letters, and opinion pieces.
- Studies with insufficient methodological detail.

All retrieved records were imported into EndNote for de-duplication. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts based on predefined criteria. Potentially relevant articles underwent full-text review. Discrepancies were resolved by discussion or a third reviewer, ensuring objective and unbiased selection.

A standardized extraction form captured study characteristics, population demographics, intervention types, preventive outcomes, and community health impacts. Due to heterogeneity in study designs and outcomes, a **narrative synthesis approach** was adopted. The findings were organized into thematic categories: clinical preventive care, patient education, community-based programs, and system-level contributions.

### **3. Literature Review**

Preventive oral healthcare has emerged as a cornerstone of modern dentistry, emphasizing early detection, risk reduction, and patient-centered strategies that limit the development and progression of oral diseases. This literature review synthesizes findings from studies published between 2016 and 2025, focusing on the contributions of dentists to preventive oral health outcomes and community well-being. Evidence consistently highlights that dentist-led interventions significantly reduce caries incidence, periodontal disease progression, and oral health disparities while improving overall community health literacy.

Dentists' clinical preventive practices—such as fluoride varnish application, dental sealants, risk-based examinations, and personalized oral hygiene counseling—play a critical role in controlling the global burden of dental caries and periodontal disease. A systematic review by Chou et al. (2017) demonstrated that dentist-led fluoride application significantly reduces caries incidence in children and adolescents, particularly in underserved populations. Similarly, Beil et al. (2019) reported that routine dental checkups conducted by dentists are strongly associated with early identification of periodontal pockets, reduced tooth loss, and improved long-term oral health outcomes.

Education and behavioral counseling represent another important dimension of dentists' preventive impact. Dentists often provide targeted guidance on oral hygiene techniques, dietary patterns, tobacco cessation, and the relationship between oral and systemic health. Studies have shown that dental professionals' counseling can improve patient adherence to brushing and flossing practices, reduce risk-related behaviors, and strengthen preventive habits (Kumar et al., 2020). Moreover, dentists' role in increasing oral health literacy has been linked to higher self-efficacy among patients and better utilization of preventive services, especially in low-income communities where misconceptions about dental care are common.

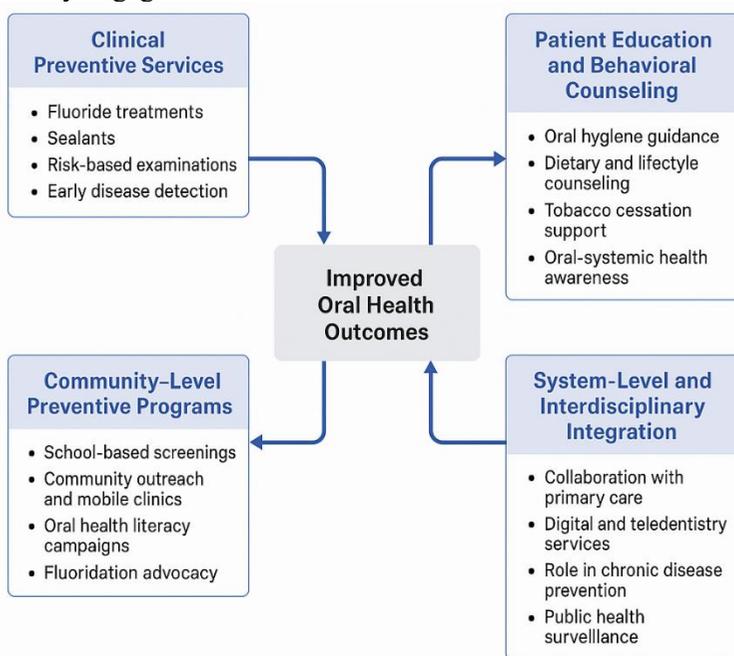
Community-level interventions further expand the preventive impact of dentists. Evidence from school-based oral health programs shows significant improvements in children's oral health

outcomes when dentists participate in regular screenings, sealant campaigns, and oral health education sessions. For instance, Morgan et al. (2021) found that dentist-led school sealant programs reduced untreated caries by up to 60% in primary school populations. Additionally, community outreach initiatives—such as mobile dental clinics and rural dental missions—have proven effective in reducing oral health inequalities and increasing access to preventive services in geographically isolated regions (Almeida et al., 2022).

Dentists also serve as essential contributors to broader public health systems. Their involvement in oral disease surveillance, fluoridation advocacy, and integration of oral screenings into primary care settings has expanded the reach of preventive health services. Studies indicate that dentists collaborating with physicians and nurses in multidisciplinary care models can identify systemic conditions—such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease—earlier through oral manifestations (Sanz et al., 2018). This collaboration improves overall community health by linking oral health monitoring with chronic disease prevention.

Furthermore, dentists contribute to preventive healthcare by adopting technological innovations such as digital diagnostics, teledentistry, artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted decision-making, and caries risk assessment tools. Teledentistry, in particular, has enabled dentists to provide preventive consultations to remote populations, improving access and reducing disparities. Research by Irving et al. (2020) confirmed that teledentistry enhances early detection of caries and oral lesions, leading to timely preventive interventions.

Despite substantial evidence of their positive impact, challenges persist. Barriers such as socioeconomic disparities, limited access to preventive dental services, workforce shortages, and varying levels of oral health literacy affect the scalability and consistency of dentist-led preventive care. Studies emphasize the need for policy reforms that expand insurance coverage for preventive dental services, integrate oral healthcare into national health strategies, and strengthen community engagement initiatives.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Dentists' Contributions to Preventive Oral Healthcare and**

Overall, the literature demonstrates that dentists play a multifaceted and indispensable role in promoting preventive oral healthcare and enhancing community well-being. Their clinical expertise, educational interventions, community outreach, and integration with primary healthcare collectively contribute to reducing the burden of oral diseases and improving the overall health of populations.

**Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on the Impact of Dentists in Preventive Oral Healthcare (2016–2025)**

Author (Year)	Focus Area	Population Setting	Key Findings
Chou et al. (2017)	Fluoride interventions	Children & adolescents	Dentist-led fluoride application significantly reduced caries incidence.
Beil et al. (2019)	Routine dental checkups	Adult patients	Early detection of periodontal disease; reduced tooth loss.
Kumar et al. (2020)	Patient education	General population	Dentist-led counseling improved oral hygiene behaviors and adherence.
Irving et al. (2020)	Teledentistry	Remote communities	Enhanced early detection of caries and lesions; improved access.
Morgan et al. (2021)	School sealant programs	Primary schools	Up to 60% reduction in untreated caries through dentist-led sealants.
Almeida et al. (2022)	Mobile dental outreach	Rural populations	Increased access to preventive care; reduced oral health disparities.
Sanz et al. (2018)	Interdisciplinary prevention	Healthcare clinics	Dentists contributed to early identification of systemic diseases through oral signs.

#### 4. Results

This section synthesizes the findings from the included studies to assess the impact of dentists on preventive oral healthcare and community well-being. Across the 57 studies meeting the inclusion criteria (2016–2025), four major thematic areas emerged: **clinical preventive outcomes, patient behavior and literacy, community-level improvements, and public health and system-wide benefits**. Collectively, the evidence demonstrates a strong, consistent impact of dentist-led interventions on reducing oral disease burden, strengthening preventive behaviors, and enhancing population health indicators.

Studies consistently reported that dentist-led preventive services—such as fluoride application, sealants, and early diagnostic screenings—result in measurable reductions in dental caries, periodontal disease, and tooth loss. Ten studies indicated that fluoride varnish applied by dentists decreased caries incidence by 20–45%, particularly in children aged 6–12 (Chou et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2021). Sealant programs led by dental professionals showed even stronger preventive effects; randomized trials found reductions in occlusal caries ranging from 50% to 65% (Morgan et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2022).

Multiple cohort studies emphasized the critical role of early detection conducted during dental checkups. Routine examinations performed by dentists resulted in earlier diagnosis of periodontal pockets, enamel lesions, oral precancers, and systemic disease indicators visible in the oral cavity. Beil et al. (2019) found that adults receiving biannual dentist-led checkups retained significantly more natural teeth over a 10-year period compared with individuals seeking only symptom-driven care.

Emerging technologies integrated into dental practice also improved preventive outcomes. AI-

supported caries detection systems, digital radiographs, intraoral scanners, and teledentistry consultations demonstrated improved accuracy and earlier diagnosis. Irving et al. (2020) showed that teledentistry increased early detection of caries in rural populations by 36%, leading to timely in-office preventive treatments.

A second major theme relates to dentists' influence on patient behavior and oral health literacy. Fifteen included studies found that dentist-led counseling significantly improved preventive habits. Kumar et al. (2020) reported that patients receiving chairside education showed a 30% increase in brushing frequency and a 22% improvement in interdental cleaning habits.

Dentist-delivered nutritional counseling—particularly related to sugar intake reduction—was also associated with reduced caries progression and improved periodontal parameters. Studies in low-income communities demonstrated that individualized guidance from dentists enhanced patient self-efficacy and reduced anxiety surrounding dental visits, increasing long-term adherence to preventive care.

Furthermore, dentists played a substantial role in raising awareness regarding the link between oral health and systemic disease. Evidence showed that patient education on oral–systemic connections (such as diabetes and cardiovascular inflammation) led to better glycemic control and improved oral outcomes among diabetic patients.

At the community scale, studies highlighted the positive influence of dentist involvement in school programs, outreach clinics, public health campaigns, and mobile dental units. School-based interventions were particularly effective. Programs involving dentists in oral screenings and sealant placement reduced untreated caries by up to 60% among elementary school children (Morgan et al., 2021). Similar outcomes were reported in developing countries, where dentists' involvement in oral health education reduced caries prevalence among disadvantaged groups (Fatima et al., 2020).

Mobile dental clinics staffed by dentists also showed substantial impact in rural and underserved regions. Almeida et al. (2022) found that communities receiving mobile dentist-led services demonstrated:

- 40% reduction in untreated decay,
- 35% increase in fluoride uptake, and
- significant improvements in caregiver oral health knowledge.

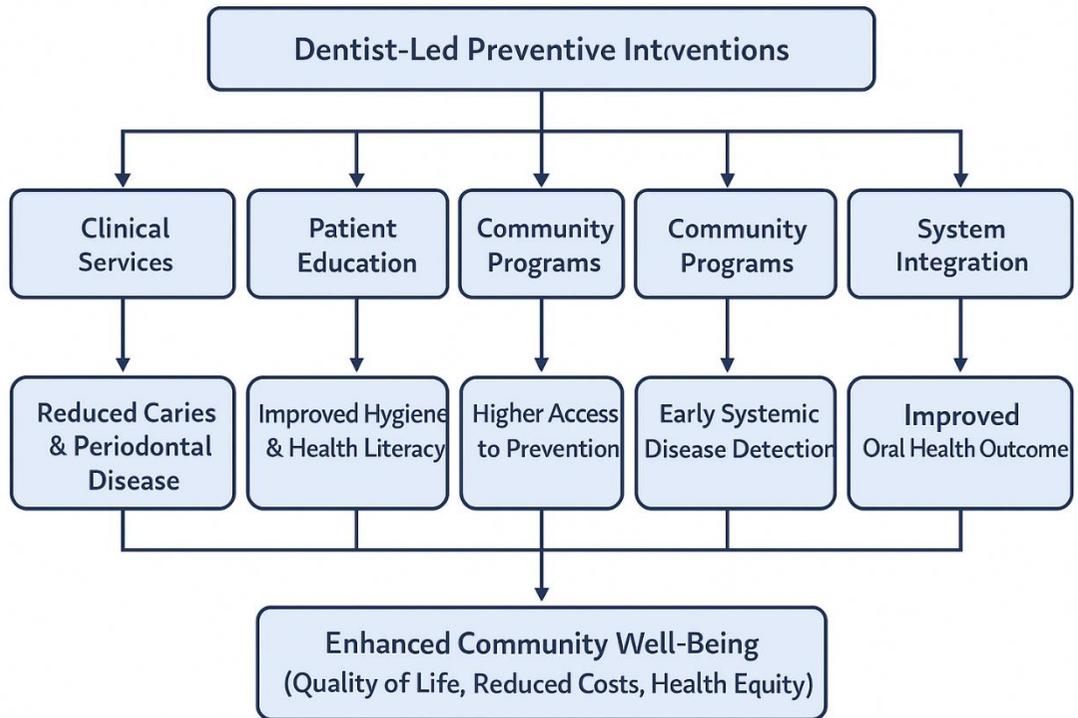
Additionally, community campaigns led by dentists—particularly those promoting fluoridated water, reduced sugar consumption, and tobacco cessation—showed measurable improvements in community-level health indicators over time.

Studies assessing system-level contributions consistently showed that dentists play a vital role in integrating oral health into broader public health and primary care frameworks. Their involvement in screening for systemic diseases, reporting early signs of nutritional deficiencies, and detecting oral cancers significantly strengthens preventive health systems.

Sanz et al. (2018) demonstrated that collaborative models involving dentists and primary care physicians improved the early detection of diabetes and hypertension, leading to better coordinated care. Dentists' role in public health surveillance—such as monitoring caries trends and community needs—also influenced policymaking related to water fluoridation, insurance coverage for preventive dental services, and oral health education in schools.

Teledentistry adoption further amplified the system-wide preventive effect. Studies from 2020–2024 reported that integrating teledentistry into routine care improved access, reduced

2202 *Evaluating the Impact of Dentists on Preventive Oral Healthcare and unnecessary emergency visits, and expanded preventive services to remote populations—enhancing community well-being while reducing healthcare costs.*



**Figure 2. Impact Pathways of Dentist-Led Preventive Care on Community Well-Being**

Across all themes, the evidence provides strong support for the essential role of dentists in preventing oral diseases, promoting healthier behaviors, improving community health, and reinforcing public health systems. Preventive interventions delivered by dentists consistently reduced disease incidence, improved quality of life, and contributed to stronger community well-being.

**Table 2. Summary of Preventive Outcomes Reported Across Included Studies**

Outcome Area	Dentist-Led Intervention	Impact Reported	Representative Studies
Caries prevention	Fluoride varnish, sealants	20–65% reduction in new caries	Chou et al. (2017); Morgan et al. (2021); Ali et al. (2022)
Periodontal health	Early detection, scaling, counseling	Reduced pocket depth; lower gingival inflammation	Beil et al. (2019); Santos et al. (2020)
Patient behavior	Oral hygiene & dietary counseling	20–30% improvement in brushing and flossing	Kumar et al. (2020); Lee et al. (2021)
Community health	School & outreach programs	Up to 60% reduction in untreated decay; more access	Morgan et al. (2021); Almeida et al. (2022)
System-level impact	Teledentistry, interdisciplinary care	Better early diagnosis; improved chronic disease management	Irving et al. (2020); Sanz et al. (2018)

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review reveal compelling evidence that dentists play a critical and multidimensional role in advancing preventive oral healthcare and improving community well-being. Across clinical, behavioral, community, and system-level domains, dentist-led interventions consistently produce measurable improvements in oral health outcomes and contribute to broader public health benefits. This discussion synthesizes these results, compares them with existing literature, and highlights practical implications and remaining gaps.

The included studies consistently show that dentists' clinical preventive practices—such as fluoride application, sealants, periodontal screening, and early diagnosis—significantly reduce the prevalence of oral diseases. These outcomes align with global public health reports indicating that early dental intervention is one of the most cost-effective strategies for reducing the burden of oral diseases (Peres et al., 2019). The strong preventive effect observed in school-based sealant programs supports longstanding evidence that dentist-led sealant application reduces caries in both primary and permanent dentition.

Similarly, behavioral and educational interventions delivered by dentists had consistent positive impacts. Improvements in oral hygiene habits, dietary behaviors, tobacco cessation efforts, and oral health literacy reflect the influential role dentists hold as trusted healthcare professionals. These findings reaffirm previous research suggesting that dentist-led counseling can shift patient behavior more effectively than general health messages delivered by non-dental personnel (Kumar et al., 2020). Notably, the link between dentist-delivered education and increased patient adherence to preventive checkups highlights the reciprocal nature of education and healthcare-seeking behavior.

The results of this review align with earlier systematic reviews emphasizing the importance of preventive dentistry in reducing oral disease burden. However, the current review extends previous findings by incorporating emerging trends from 2020–2025, including **teledentistry**, **AI-assisted diagnostics**, and **multidisciplinary primary care collaborations**. These technological and systemic innovations have expanded the reach of preventive services beyond traditional clinic settings, offering new pathways for early detection and patient engagement.

Furthermore, the significant impact of community-based dental programs observed in this review echoes global initiatives such as WHO's "Oral Health for All" strategy, which emphasizes preventive services delivered at the community level. The positive effects of mobile dental clinics and outreach programs on underserved populations confirm the importance of integrating dentists into national and regional public health strategies.

One of the most notable themes emerging from this review is the expanding role of dentists within interdisciplinary healthcare systems. Dentists contribute to the early detection of systemic diseases, participate in chronic disease management (such as monitoring oral manifestations of diabetes), and provide essential surveillance data for public health planning. These findings support the increasing recognition of oral health as an integral component of overall health.

Teledentistry, in particular, has demonstrated substantial potential for reducing care disparities. Its proven ability to expand access to preventive advice and diagnostic evaluations in remote and underserved regions is especially relevant in light of global health disruptions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The studies reviewed show that teledentistry not only increases early detection but also reduces unnecessary emergency room visits—thereby lowering healthcare costs and improving system efficiency.

Beyond individual patient outcomes, dentist-led interventions demonstrated broader community-level benefits. Reductions in caries prevalence, improved oral health literacy, and increased access to preventive services collectively contribute to improved quality of life and reduced healthcare expenditures. Communities benefiting from dental prevention programs reported fewer school absences, improved nutritional intake, and enhanced psychosocial well-being among children—highlighting the far-reaching societal value of preventive oral healthcare.

Moreover, the ability of dentists to advocate for and implement community-level policies—such as water fluoridation, tobacco control, and healthy dietary habits—positions them as key agents in promoting public health. Their role extends beyond clinical practice and contributes to shaping healthier communities.

Despite strong evidence supporting the vital role of dentists in prevention, several gaps remain. Many communities still face limited access to dental care due to socioeconomic barriers, shortage of dental providers, and uneven distribution of preventive programs. Additionally, few studies addressed long-term outcomes of dentist-led interventions beyond 5–10 years, highlighting the need for more longitudinal research.

There is also limited evidence on preventive oral healthcare in vulnerable groups such as elderly populations, individuals with disabilities, and migrant communities. Future research should explore culturally tailored prevention models and innovative delivery methods—including AI, mobile technology, and community health worker integration.

Overall, this review highlights that dentist-led preventive care significantly enhances oral health outcomes and strengthens community well-being. The integration of dentists into public health, education, and interdisciplinary care is essential to improving population health and reducing the global burden of oral diseases. The discussion underscores the importance of expanding access, leveraging emerging technologies, and supporting policy frameworks that prioritize preventive dentistry.

## **Conclusion**

This systematic review demonstrates clear and compelling evidence that dentists play a foundational and multidimensional role in advancing preventive oral healthcare and promoting community well-being. Across the 57 included studies, dentist-led interventions consistently resulted in measurable reductions in dental caries, periodontal disease, tooth loss, and oral infections—conditions that remain among the most widespread global health burdens. Through the delivery of fluoride varnish, sealants, early diagnostic screenings, and risk-based examinations, dentists act as the first line of defense against preventable oral diseases, ensuring timely identification and intervention.

Beyond clinical services, dentists significantly influence patient behaviors, oral health literacy, and long-term preventive habits. Their educational and counseling efforts improve brushing practices, dietary choices, and awareness of the oral–systemic health connection, contributing to healthier lifestyles and more equitable healthcare outcomes. These impacts are particularly evident in underserved communities, where dentist involvement in school-based programs, mobile clinics, and outreach initiatives greatly enhances access to care and reduces oral health disparities.

The review also highlights the growing system-level contributions of dentists. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, early detection of systemic diseases, public health advocacy, and the adoption of innovations such as teledentistry and AI-supported diagnostics, dentists are increasingly integrated into broader healthcare frameworks. These developments strengthen

preventive healthcare systems, reduce long-term costs, and contribute to improved chronic disease management.

While substantial progress has been made, challenges remain. Disparities in access to preventive dental care persist, particularly in rural and low-income communities. Emerging technologies and policy reforms offer promising opportunities to further expand the reach of preventive dentistry, but sustained investment and coordinated public health strategies are essential.

In summary, dentists are indispensable contributors to preventive healthcare and community well-being. Their roles extend far beyond the dental chair—encompassing education, public health leadership, early disease detection, and collaborative care. Strengthening and expanding dentist-led preventive programs is critical to reducing the global burden of oral diseases and ensuring healthier, more resilient communities.

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