

Bridging the Gap: Fostering Collaboration between Academics and Regulators in Saudi Arabia's Dental Industry

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We would like to shed light on an important aspect of healthcare governance in Saudi Arabia and the need for improvements within the dental sector. The Saudi Vision 2030 presents a unique opportunity to establish a more effective oral healthcare system [1], and the government's initiatives led by the Saudi Ministry of Health are encouraging progress in the dental field. [2]

To ensure continued momentum and achieve optimal oral healthcare outcomes, it is crucial to invest in reinforcing regulations, advancing education, and leveraging cutting-edge technology. Following established guidelines will guarantee the highest quality, safety standards, and optimal dental care delivery.

Dental materials and devices play a significant role in the dental ecosystem, impacting clinicians, researchers, suppliers, and patients. In Saudi Arabia, the approval process for dental materials is overseen by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) [3], which rigorously reviews and regulates these materials to ensure safety and efficacy. Additionally, the High Commission for Industrial Security (HCIS) [4] contributes its oversight in protecting public health, particularly in cases involving materials containing medication or controlled substances. The SFDA's commitment and efforts are commendable, reflecting a mature and quality-focused establishment that serves as an exemplary regulatory body across the country.

While the SFDA handles the approval process, it is important to distinguish the role of the National Unified Procurement Company for Medical Supplies (NUPCO). NUPCO plays a crucial role in improving Saudi Arabia's healthcare system through centralized procurement processes. However, it functions as a logistical and supply chain entity rather than having the authority to grant approvals or permissions in the healthcare sector. Thus, while NUPCO aids in the efficient procurement of medical supplies, it is the SFDA that have the authority and responsibility for ensuring the safety and efficacy of dental materials and devices.

Although the SFDA has made significant progress in simplifying and expediting the approval process for dental materials, challenges remain for dental material consumers. Notably, there is a need for a comprehensive and easily accessible list of approved materials or devices, sorted by type or usage. Additionally, the lack of transparency surrounding the identities of the individuals responsible for evaluation and approval raises concerns about accountability. Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated dental department limits the availability of specialized support.

To overcome these challenges, a collaborative effort involving academia, field experts, dental specialty professional societies, and regulatory bodies is essential. By forging partnerships and actively involving these

stakeholders, we can foster knowledge sharing, promote innovation, and streamline approval processes. Leveraging the expertise of academics allows the creation of context-aware standards, ensuring that dental materials meet the highest safety and efficacy benchmarks.

Establishing a dedicated dental department within the SFDA offers numerous advantages. It opens new career opportunities for dental graduates, facilitates collaboration among experts, enhances efficiency, transparency, and accountability, and allows for tailored standards and regulations that address the specific needs of the dental sector in Saudi Arabia.

Joint initiatives involving academia, industry, and regulatory bodies have the potential to attract funding for further research and implementation opportunities. This not only enhances patient care but also contributes to the overall advancement of the dental sector. Additionally, integrating experts and academia in the governance process addresses ethical, social, and environmental concerns related to dental materials. These collaborations facilitate the development and enforcement of proper ethical guidelines, promoting responsible innovation in the industry.

By implementing these recommendations and promoting collaboration between academia and the industry, a transparent, efficient, and context-aware process for dental materials approval and advancement can be es-

tablished. This approach benefits both patients and professionals, ensuring the optimal use of dental materials in delivering high-quality oral healthcare. To successfully address challenges and promote the safe and effective use of dental materials and devices, ongoing dialog, information exchange, and the active involvement of all stakeholders are essential. By uniting to share knowledge, expertise, and resources, we can elevate the Saudi Arabian dental sector to new heights under the visionary framework of the Saudi Vision 2030.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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