

Editorial Note on Periodontics and Prosthodontics- Dentistry

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Received Date: January 23, 2021; **Accepted Date:** January 23, 2021; **Published Date:** January 29, 2021

Citation: Dr. Haby Mathew Somson (2021) Fabrication of Verification Jig for Full Arch Implant Support Fixed Prosthesis- A Novel Technique. *Periodon Prosthodon* 2019, 7:1.

Editorial

Dentistry, also known as dental medicine and oral medicine, is a branch of medicine that consists of the study, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of diseases, disorders, and conditions of the oral cavity, commonly in the dentition but also the oral mucosa, and of adjacent and related structures and tissues, particularly in the maxillofacial (jaw and facial) area. Although primarily associated with teeth among the general public, the field of dentistry or dental medicine is not limited to teeth but includes other aspects of the craniofacial complex including the temporomandibular joint and other supporting, muscular, lymphatic, nervous, vascular, and anatomical structures.

Dental treatments are carried out by a dental team, which often consists of a dentist and dental auxiliaries (dental assistants, dental hygienists, dental technicians, as well as dental therapists). Most dentists either work in private practices (primary care), dental hospitals or (secondary care) institutions (prisons, armed forces bases, etc.). Dentistry, in some form, has been practiced since ancient times. For example, Egyptian skulls dating from 2900 to 2750 BCE contain evidence of small holes in the jaw in the vicinity of a tooth's roots. Such holes are believed to have been drilled to drain abscesses. In addition, accounts of dental treatment appear in Egyptian scrolls dating from 1500 BCE. It is thought that the Egyptians practiced oral surgery perhaps as early as 2500 BCE, although evidence for this is minimal. An early attempt at tooth replacement dates to Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) around 600 BCE, where missing teeth were replaced with animal teeth and were bound into place with cord.

Dentistry is one of the oldest medical professions, dating back to 7000 B.C. with the Indus Valley Civilization. However, it wasn't until 5000 B.C. that descriptions related to dentistry and tooth decay were available. At the time, a Sumerian text described tooth worms as causing dental decay, an idea that wasn't proven false until the 1700s! In ancient Greece, Hippocrates and Aristotle wrote about dentistry, specifically about treating decaying teeth, but it wasn't until 1530 that the first book entirely devoted to dentistry—*The Little Medicinal Book for All Kinds of Diseases and Infirmities of the Teeth*—was published. By the 1700s, dentistry had become a more defined profession. In 1723, Pierre Fauchard, a French surgeon credited as the Father of Modern Dentistry, published his influential book, *The Surgeon Dentist, a Treatise on Teeth*, which for the first time defined a comprehensive system for caring for and treating teeth. Additionally, Fauchard first introduced the idea of dental fillings and the use of dental prosthesis, and he identified that acids from sugar led to tooth decay.

In 1840, the first dental college (Baltimore College of Dental Surgery) opened, establishing the need for more oversight. In the United States, Alabama led the way by enacting the first dental practice act in 1841, and nearly 20 years later, the American Dental Association (ADA) was formed. The first university-affiliated dental institution, the Harvard University Dental School, was founded in 1867. By 1873, Colgate had mass produced the first toothpaste, and mass-produced toothbrushes followed a few years later. What may come as a surprise is that the first African American to earn a dental degree dates all the way back to 1869, and the first female dental assistant was employed in New Orleans in 1885. What might be most surprising of all is that most Americans did not adopt good brushing habits until after World War II, when soldiers stationed abroad brought the concept of good oral health back to the United States!