

# PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS REGARDING MARKETING SERVICES PROVIDED BY MEDICAL UNITS SPECIALIZED IN DENTISTRY (DENTAL OFFICES / DENTAL CLINICS, DENTAL LABORATORIES)

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**Abstract:** Dental services market in Romania is growing and the development is not always based on careful research of the market so that the offer could reflect the desire and demand of services. The purpose of this study is outlining a marketing strategy more efficient and productive for dentistry. **Materials and methods:** For this study, a structured questionnaire was used, which was applied to 148 subjects. The results of the questionnaire outline a clear picture of patients' needs concerning attention given to health care from the perspective of patient preferences regarding location, atmosphere and dental treatment stimulation by offering bonuses. **Conclusions:** Dental treatment market is ruled by patient's income and the cost of dental treatment. Furthermore, patients respond positively to loyalty programs in dental treatment and become sensitive when educational programs are designed with interdictions or restrictive advices.

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, one of the most popular definitions of "marketing concept" is that marketing is "the science and art of persuading customers to buy".(1,2) Philip Kotler defined marketing as "a social and managerial process by which individuals or groups of individuals get what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products and services to some value".(1,2) In short, marketing is "the art and science of selling".(1,2,3,4)

But in this paper, we have not proposed redefining "marketing concept" but, instead, from these two very simple and understandable to all definitions mentioned above, we want to actually present a preliminary analysis regarding marketing services provided by medical units specialized in dentistry (dental offices / dental clinics, dental laboratories).(1-4)

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to answer questions related to opportunity to achieve some changes in dentistry and dental trade, regarding the guidance of production and trading. The main goal is outlining as far as possible, of a most efficient and productive future marketing strategy for dentistry (including dental technology).

The main component of this study refers to the perception of patients regarding dental market, as they are the target group of dental care services market in Romania.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the perceptions of patients about the benefits and satisfactions brought by specialized treatments they receive, in our attempt to develop premises for shaping future trends of dentistry and dental technology in Romania.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To accomplish the purposes of the study, we used as research method a prospective survey by questionnaires applied online during May-July 2016, responding to our survey 148

people. For data collection, semi-structured interview technique using discussion guide was used. Marketing research questions of the tendencies of maintaining dental health and the patients' perceptions about products / medical services that they benefit from were:

1. What are your preferences of current consumption?
2. How do you assess the price of medical services in this dental clinic / dental office? What about quality-price ratio?
3. How would you rate the location (distance to the house) and ambiance in this location?
4. How often do you get to the dental office? (Argument and explanation). Do you get bonuses for treating dental problems?
5. Would you recommend to your friends and relatives the quality of health services from this clinic?

## RESULTS

The existence purpose of a marketing system in dental practice is to meet patient needs, beneficiary of dental care, and to maintain and restore his health oro-dental. Rewarding is the meaning of effort made from the dental consultation and until the sale of dental medical services (dental treatment). The purchase or payment of these services rewards in one way or another all participants involved in achieving this satisfaction; what is very important, however, is choosing the treatment solution for patient, that entail a series of consequences for the entire dental healthcare system.(2-4)

Knowledge of demand namely final treatment variants is necessary, from at least the following reasons:(2-4)

- allows dentists and dental technicians to focus their production in terms of structure, quantity and quality and, therefore, to base their behavior concerning the conditions of sale which they expect in future;
- directs dealer of materials and raw materials in choosing products assortments which they will buy to resell it to dentists and dental technicians in terms of quantity, quality,

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time and place of their choice. Should be noted that dentists and dental technicians expectations only slightly correspond to those made by distributors; usually dealers estimations (especially of the retailers) are more accurate closer to the truth, because they are closer to technicians and know better their needs;

- helps marketing system to correct on the move anticipation errors mentioned above; sometimes the consequences of these unadjusted errors over time can cause severe damages to the companies involved. It is much less expensive to correct errors on the way than when it is too late to do this.

Preliminary results of the study conducted by online questionnaire regarding patient perceptions about health services that they benefit from were as follows:

To question no. 1 regarding population's consumption expenses structure, there is a high share of spending on food consumption (along with alcohol and tobacco), it being assigned more than half of all consumption expenses. This high contribution shows a standard of living relatively low of population from Romania, considering that the share of current consumption expenses in total income is high.(2-4)

From statistics point of view, at the national level, with the entry into a ascending trend of purchasing power, there has been a slight decrease of the expenses share that the Romanians allocate for purchasing food products in the total consumption expenses and therefore of total income.(5,6)

Using information obtained from our survey also published in paper entitled "Preliminary statistical study on applying the marketing concept in dental technique" (2-4), we highlighted how a number of factors such as socio-economic and demographic (occupational status; area of residence, age, family size, income level), influence the allocation of expenses

for health care in Romania (table no. 1).

These factors do not act remotely but rather are in a strong interrelationship.(2-4)

Thus, the occupation of the head of family has a major influence on income, the income level generating differences in both the structure of consumption expenses and in terms of health care habits. On the other hand, work status is determined mainly by environmental housing.(2-4)

Expense categories reveal both similarities and differences in families, according to professional status, regarding expenses incurred. Thus, retired persons are oriented in a greater manner on health care expenses, comparatively to the employees.(2-4)

We consider that health education has a very important role, and the factors that prevent development of methods and techniques used in health education are those related to population, meaning that many individuals consider themselves healthy. In reality, however, they are apparently or still healthy, and most of the people appreciates health when they lose it, being uninterested in the required preventive measures. Adopting a healthy lifestyle entails behavioral changes at community members' level, who will adopt that lifestyle.

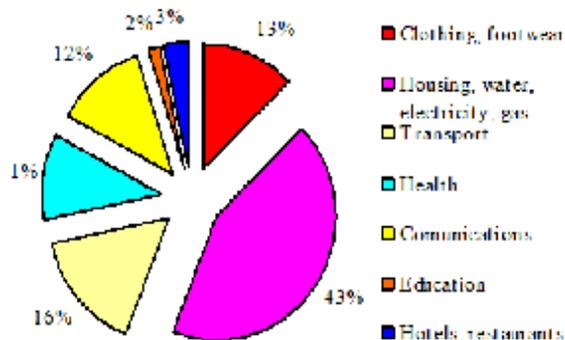
Therefore, educational activity should be considered a tool for ensuring a harmonious balance of life and not as prohibition or restrictive advice.

Interpersonal relationships are essential for maintaining the health of a community through which they can promote new methods of health education, especially for groups at increased risk of falling ill (figure no 1).(2-4)

**Table no. 1. Health care spending share of different professional categories**

Specification	Total interviewed families	From which by categories upon the head of family occupational status				
		Employees	Contractors	Farmers	Unemployed	Retired Person
Family Distribution %	100	35	4	9	18	34
Total consumption expenses (RON per month per family), of which:	1614,06	1981,02	1518,45	1266,6	1356,36	1393,05
Food products and soft drinks	44,2%	39,2%	45,2%	57,8%	48,5%	47,7%
Clothing, footwear	5%	5,9%	5,5%	5,4%	3,5%	3,9%
Housing, water, electricity, gas	16,7%	16,3%	14,5%	11,5%	18,9%	18%
Transport	6,1%	7,7%	6,2%	4,1%	4,4%	4,6%
Health	4,3%	2,5%	2,4%	1,7%	3,1%	7,7%
Communications	4,8%	5,5%	4,4%	3,2%	5,4%	4,1%
Education	0,6%	1%	0,6%	0,1%	0,4%	0,2%
Hotels, restaurants	1,3%	1,7%	2,1%	1,2%	0,9%	2,2%

**Figure no. 1. Overall typology of expenses categories**



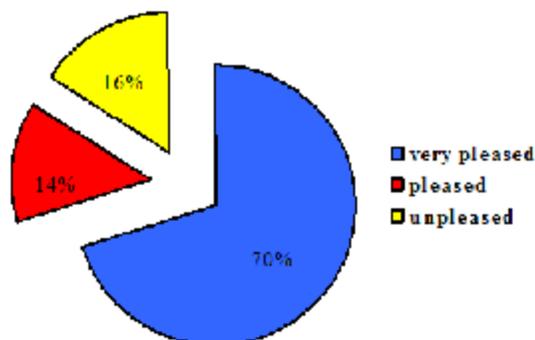
In the private sector, for question no. 2, the majority of respondents are satisfied with the quality of dental medical services received (70%). It points out even a number of very satisfied patients (14%). (2-4)

There is, however, a small group of unpleased people in this regard (16%) (figure no 2), due to costs considered by the patients to be high and not because of the low quality of dental work.(2-4) Dental health care prices, although rated as high in Romania, however, remain very low relative to those abroad, especially in the developed countries of European Union (Germany, France, Holland, Belgium etc.) and the U.S.(2-4)

Lowering prices of dental medical services, decrease of waiting times and improving the attitude of dental practitioner towards patients, improving the level of dental office equipment, improving the hygiene of medical staff/ dental office, are ideal grounds for educating the patient in maintaining his oral-health.(2-4) In public health system, patients place in the first place the issues related to quality of dental services, in order to improve it (47%). Trying to limit the time spent in the waiting room is also very important (20%). On the lower levels, but worthy to be mentioned are good doctor-patient relationship (3%), the level of sanitation of the dental office (10%) and the level of technical equipment (20%).(2-4)

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Figure no. 2. The level of patient satisfaction in dental care market



Patient satisfaction is given by the way the doctor manages to meet the expectations of patients. Patient expects from dentist to be highly professional and to be able to establish a good human relationship. However, a patient does not choose their dentist mainly based on professional qualifications, but based on doctor-patient interrelationship, appreciating more a cozy dental medical assistance.(2-4)

When asked, "How often do you get to the dental office? (Argument and explanation). Do you get bonuses for treating dental problems?" we can say that the current situation in Romania, shows that the health system responds far too little to the patients needs and the dignity of the medical guild is continuously tested. Doctors and patients believe they have more need for transparency in the use of contributions for social health insurance, for everything they need. Many medical specialties are deficient in most rural and urban areas of the country, computerized systems, although necessary, work with too many gaps, altering the quality of healthcare and do not reduce stifling paperwork. These arguments are valid in dentistry as a stand-alone medical specialty in Romania, with independent education and profile universities.(2-4)

The last question "Would you recommend to your friends and relatives the quality of health services from this clinic?" answers were highly varied and a centralization of these answers shows that patients come for treatment in emergency situations, most of the times when there is nothing to do. The relationship dental practitioner - patient - dental technician is now a fragile structure, based on trust, but with no system of recommendations and rewards for the new patients of dental clinics.

### DISCUSSIONS

Dental services in Romania are at this point almost entirely in the private sector, except for special assistance within school networks, the medical academic education or subordinated to different ministries (Transport, Defence, Internal Affairs etc.). But for an increase of profits in the field of dental medicine (including dental technology), most professionals invest a huge capital both in equipment and in training, for the quality of medical dental care to be one at the highest standards.

Unfortunately, expense for materials, equipment and specialized instruments, and that of courses/profile specializations are relative to the levels from developed countries of European Union (Germany, France), UK and / or USA costs that these professionals from Romania support them from their own pockets and according to simple rules of accounting, should be amortized. This amortization is achieved from dental medical treatments. Therefore, dental services from Romania shows significantly elevated costs for the local

population (a population impoverished by an old and sick system), but still very attractive to foreigners. In this regard, the last two decades has developed in Romania, a so-called medical tourism, in fact dental tourism, which represents after all a form of survival for thousands of dental offices, which were opened in urban areas in the last two decades.

### CONCLUSIONS

Through this preliminary study, we can list several general conclusions as follows:

- The analysis and market research suggests that demand for dental services is a function of at least two variables: price and income.
- The number of treatments / month is more influent than the cost of the treatment to ensure a high level of economic performance. Thus, it is mandatory for an effective marketing plan to include a customer loyalty program.
- Development strategy of a clinic / dental office and / or dental laboratory in order to have a high market share, should assess health status of the community to invest in the patients education, then to determine the current positions and of desired specialized dental medical units on its market segments.
- Regarding oral health, in order to be effective, educational activity should be considered a tool to ensure a harmonious balance of life and not as a prohibition or restrictive advice.
- In patients' perceptions, currently the health system in Romania hardly meets their needs.
- Patients and doctors believe they need more transparency in the use of contributions from social health insurance, for all that is necessary.
- IT systems, although necessary, work with too many gaps, altering the quality of healthcare and do not reduce excessive paperwork.

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