



Perspective article

# Integrating narrative medicine in periodontal surgery: A holistic approach



Chia-Ming Liu <sup>a,b</sup>, Yi-Tzu Chen <sup>a,b</sup>, Yu-Chao Chang <sup>a,b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Dentistry, Chung Shan Medical University, Taichung, Taiwan

<sup>b</sup> Department of Dentistry, Chung Shan Medical University Hospital, Taichung, Taiwan

Received 1 January 2024; Final revision received 5 January 2024

Available online 23 January 2024

Narrative medicine was launched by Dr. Charon with a conceptual picture of a narrative type in daily medical practice based on a model of empathy, trust, professionalism, and reflection.<sup>1</sup> Narrative medicine has been applied for teaching how to know the experience of an illness to enhance patient-dentist discourse<sup>2</sup> and further achieve the holistically dental care.<sup>3</sup> Narrative medicine was also reported to be a good tool for the improvement of nonoperational capabilities, mini-clinical evaluation exercise, objective structured clinical examination performances.<sup>4–6</sup> Recently, narrative medicine was found to effectively facilitate oral hygiene instruction for periodontitis patients by interns' perceptions.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the conduction of narrative medicine-based oral hygiene instruction was reported to improve plaque index and reduce probing depth in non-surgical periodontal therapy.<sup>8</sup>

Periodontal surgery is an invasive management to resolve periodontal pocket depth > 5 mm after phase I periodontal therapy. However, patient may experience anxiety or fear that can further cause psychological problems leading to postpone further treatment. Prior to the periodontal surgery, the implementation of holistic dental care can provide comprehensive support and help patients better cope with the surgical procedure and recovery. Integrating narrative medicine into the realm of periodontal surgery was proposed to enhance the overall patient experience as well as foster a good connection between patients and dentists. In this article, the authors addressed and discussed how narrative

medicine may have the benefits for patients who received periodontal surgery according to the model of empathy, trust, professionalism, and reflection.

First, emotional support is an action of empathy. Dentists can demonstrate the understanding of patients' pain and needs during routine visits. Paying attention to the patients' stories could show the concern for their feelings and the ensures of their treatment needs. The use of clear language to explain the surgical procedure and recovery process is necessary. In addition, dentists should make sure that patients have the opportunity to ask the questions.

Second, trust can be built up by structured communication. Building trust is the foundation of a successful therapeutic relationship between patients and dentists. It is suggested to establish a reliable relationship through open and structured communication. Dentists' professional knowledge and experience can enhance the patient's confidence to receive the periodontal surgery treatment. In addition, timely updates to patients and addressing their questions or concerns are also very crucial to gain patient trust.

Third, adequate information sharing is important to show the professionalism. Dentists display a high level of professional attitude, including accurate diagnosis, appropriate treatment plans, and precise execution of the periodontal surgery. Dentist should explain the necessity of periodontal surgery and expected outcomes to patients. Furthermore, dentists provide abundant information before periodontal surgery so that patients can make the informed decisions.

Finally, regular review and improvement means the reflection on practice. Regular reflection and evaluation of clinical practice could improve dentists' skills and patient

\* Corresponding author. School of Dentistry, Chung Shan Medical University, 110, Sec.1, Chien-Kuo N. Rd., Taichung, 40201, Taiwan.  
E-mail address: [cyc@csmu.edu.tw](mailto:cyc@csmu.edu.tw) (Y.-C. Chang).

**Table 1** The holistic approach in periodontal surgery by integrating narrative medicine.

Key points
Emotional support
Structured communication
Adequate information sharing
Regular review and improvement

care. Dentist should actively engage in professional development and update on the latest treatment methods and technologies. In addition, sharing the experiences with colleagues could contribute to further learning and potentially facilitate patient outcomes.

By the implementation of narrative medicine, dentists can create a conducive environment to enhance patients' satisfaction and ensure optimal medical outcomes to achieve the so-called shared decision making.<sup>9</sup> The periodontal surgery treatment process will be not only medically effective but also deeply humanity and compassionate (Table 1). Further evaluation of the outcome of integrating narrative medicine in periodontal surgery is warranted. The feedback from the patients' perception also needs to be investigated.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

### References

1. Charon R. Narrative medicine: a model for empathy, reflection, profession, and trust. *J Am Med Assoc* 2001;286:1897–902.
2. Huang YK, Chang YC. Narrative medicine as a good tool for patient-dentist discourse. *J Dent Sci* 2022;17:612.
3. Huang YK, Chen YT, Chang YC. Initiating narrative medicine into dental education: opportunity, change, and challenge. *J Formos Med Assoc* 2021;120:2191–4.
4. Chen YT, Yu CH, Chang YC. Narrative medicine as a novel tool for non-operational capabilities: dental interns' perceptions. *J Dent Sci* 2022;17:1085–6.
5. Yang PY, Yu CH, Chang YC. The role of narrative medicine in promoting mini-clinical evaluation exercise in postgraduate year training program for dentists. *J Dent Sci* 2022;17:1405–6.
6. Huang YT, Liu CM, Chang YC. Dental students' perceptions of narrative medicine for facilitating their performances in objective structured clinical examination standardized patient station. *J Dent Sci* 2023;18:1419–20.
7. Huang YK, Lai MY, Chang YC. Interns' perceptions of narrative medicine to facilitate oral hygiene instruction for periodontitis patients. *J Dent Sci* 2023;18:921–2.
8. Liu CM, Lai MY, Chang YC. Narrative medicine: a good tool to improve the treatment of patients with periodontitis. *J Dent Sci* 2023;18:1956–7.
9. Huang YK, Chen YT, Chang YC. The implementation of shared decision-making in clinical dentistry: opportunity and change. *J Formos Med Assoc* 2022;121:1890–1.