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Perspective article

# Dentistry or stomatology (oral medicine)? The name changes in the Department of Dentistry of National Taiwan University Hospital and its predecessors from 1906 to 2024



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After years of hard work, the Department of Dentistry of National Taiwan University Hospital (NTUH) finally changed its name into the Department of Stomatology (Oral Medicine) in the organizational regulations in May 2024.<sup>1</sup> So far, among the 24 medical centers in Taiwan, the dental departments of 8 hospitals have been renamed as the Department of Stomatology (Oral Medicine). In fact, the

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courses that the dental students take in the undergraduate dental schools and the clinical works that the dentists practice after graduation include not only the teeth and dental diseases but also the entire oral cavity, maxilla, mandible, and face as well as their related diseases. Therefore, the scope of practice in dentistry includes the diagnoses and treatments of a wide range of various diseases such as dental diseases, benign and malignant tumors of the oral cavity and maxillofacial region, traumatic injuries of the jaw bones, reconstruction of maxillofacial deformities, and face and neck infections. In fact, the word “Dentistry” can easily lead to a limited perception that the dentists’ professional field is the teeth only. In ancient Chinese characters, human teeth and animal teeth are written by different characters. In English, however, there is no such difference and both human and animal teeth are called as the same word of teeth.

During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), the modern western medical system was introduced to Taiwan. Since then, the “dentistry” as a proper term for modern medical profession has officially entered the daily life of Taiwanese people. The Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital established in 1895 was the largest and most modern hospital in the Southeast Asia at that time. In 1906, a dental treatment room was established within the Department of Surgery of Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital, which was the predecessor of the Department of Dentistry of NTUH.

Till 2024, the “Department of Dentistry” has been used in the hospital for 118 years.<sup>1–4</sup> Few studies in the past have systematically described the name changes of the Department of Dentistry of NTUH and its predecessors. We attempted to unearth the evolution of the name changes of the Department of Dentistry of NTUH from 1906 to 2024 through the collection and analysis of the relevant historical documents.

This article used the historical research method to excavate the series of the name changes in the relevant documents for the Department of Dentistry from that in the Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital in 1906 to that in the NTUH in 2024. The evolution of its name changes is shown in Table 1. The earliest established Department of Dentistry in the Taiwan’s dental history was the dental treatment room which was established within the Department of Surgery of Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital in 1906. During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), the dental department of the hospital was named as the Department of Dentistry in Japanese kanji. The Department of Dentistry became an independent department in 1910 and it was affiliated to the Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital from 1910 to 1938. From 1938 to 1945, the Department of Dentistry was affiliated to the Medical Faculty of the Taipei Imperial University.

From 1945 to 1947, the hospital was transformed to be the National Taiwan University Affiliated First Hospital and

**Table 1** The name changes in the Department of Dentistry of National Taiwan University Hospital.

Time	Name (affiliated hospital, dental department)	Reason for name change
1906–1910	臺灣總督府臺北醫院外科部齒科治療室 <sup>a</sup> Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital, Department of Surgery, dental treatment room	The earliest established “Department of Dentistry”
1910–1920	臺灣總督府臺北醫院齒科部 <sup>a</sup> Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital, Department of Dentistry	Department of Dentistry becoming an independent department
1920–1938	臺灣總督府臺北醫院齒科 <sup>a</sup> Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital, Department of Dentistry	Organization adjustment of the Department of Dentistry
1938–1945	臺北帝國大學醫學部附屬醫院齒科 <sup>a</sup> Taipei Imperial University Medical Faculty Affiliated Hospital, Department of Dentistry	The hospital changing its affiliation
1945–1947	國立臺灣大學醫學院第一附屬醫院牙科 <sup>b</sup> National Taiwan University Affiliated First Hospital, Department of Dentistry	The hospital transformation after the World War II
1947–1950	國立臺灣大學醫學院附屬醫院牙科 <sup>b</sup> National Taiwan University Affiliated Hospital, Department of Dentistry	The hospital name adjustment
1950–1988	國立臺灣大學醫學院附設醫院牙科 <sup>b</sup> National Taiwan University Hospital, Department of Dentistry	The hospital name adjustment
1988–2024	國立臺灣大學醫學院附設醫院牙科部 <sup>b</sup> National Taiwan University Hospital, Department of Dentistry	Organization upgrade of the Department of Dentistry
2024-present	國立臺灣大學醫學院附設醫院口腔醫學部 <sup>b</sup> National Taiwan University Hospital, Department of Stomatology	Department of Dentistry renamed as Department of Stomatology

<sup>a</sup> The names of Department of Dentistry and its affiliated hospitals written in Japanese kanji before 1945.

<sup>b</sup> The names of Department of Dentistry and its affiliated hospitals written in Chinese after 1945.

the dental department was named as the Department of Dentistry in Chinese. From 1947 to 1950, the hospital was transformed to be the National Taiwan University Affiliated Hospital and its dental department was still named as the Department of Dentistry in Chinese. After the hospital name adjustment in 1950, the hospital was renamed as its current name, the National Taiwan University Hospital (NTUH) from 1950 till 2024. In 1988, the organization of dental department was upgraded with more specialties. During this period (1988–2024), the name of the Department of Dentistry was continuously used for 36 years. Finally, in 2024, in order to comply with the trend of the world and the fact that the field of dental knowledge covers the entire oral cavity and maxillofacial region, the Department of Dentistry of NTUH was officially renamed as the Department of Stomatology (Oral Medicine). Then, the word “Department of Dentistry” either in Japanese kanji (used before 1945) or in Chinese (used after 1945), which has been used in the hospital for 118 years, went into history. However, the English name of Department of Dentistry had been used from 1910 to 2024 without any change (Table 1).

Interestingly, the construction of the knowledge system of the dentistry in the NTUH originated from the development of oral and maxillofacial surgery in Japan more than a hundred years ago. The Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery was founded at the Medical Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University in May 1899. It was probably the oldest dental education and research institution in Asia with a long history and a great influence on the dental field. The first professor, Dr. Hisashi Ishihara, graduated from the Medical Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University, and studied surgery for a long time. With the aim of establishing a new academic field of oral and maxillofacial surgery, he studied and majored in oral surgery and dentistry in Europe and the United States for three years. After returning to Japan, he established a dental classroom for the education and academic development of oral and maxillofacial surgery.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Dr. Kaname Ansawa, from Niigata Prefecture, graduated from the Medical Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University in 1911 and obtained the qualification of a physician in the following year. He was mainly a surgeon, and also worked as an assistant and studied the oral and maxillofacial surgery at the dental classroom of Tokyo Imperial University before he came to Taiwan. Dr. Ansawa came to Taiwan in 1914 and worked in the Taiwan

Government Taipei Hospital. He was appointed as the director of the Department of Dentistry.<sup>3,4</sup> Therefore, Taiwan inherited the academic foundation from the Medical Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University to develop the knowledge system of the dentistry and stomatology (oral medicine). To date, the Department of Dentistry of NTUH is the oldest and largest dental institution in Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> Whether termed the Department of Dentistry or the Department of Stomatology (Oral Medicine), it will persist in advancing within the swift evolution of modern dental sciences.

## Declaration of competing interest

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

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