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Perspective article

# A new model for the dental assistant recruitment: A leap forward in the functionality of online community groups among the dental workers in Taiwan

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According to the data from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, as of January 2024, there were 16,384 dentists, 7040 dental clinics, and 194 hospitals with dental services in Taiwan. Among them, 14,160 dentists worked in the dental clinics, accounting for 86.4% of the total number of dentists, while the other 2224 dentists worked in the hospitals, accounting for 13.6% of the total number of dentists. In other words, nearly 87% of the dentists in Taiwan worked in the dental clinics, and the number increased every year.<sup>1</sup> Based

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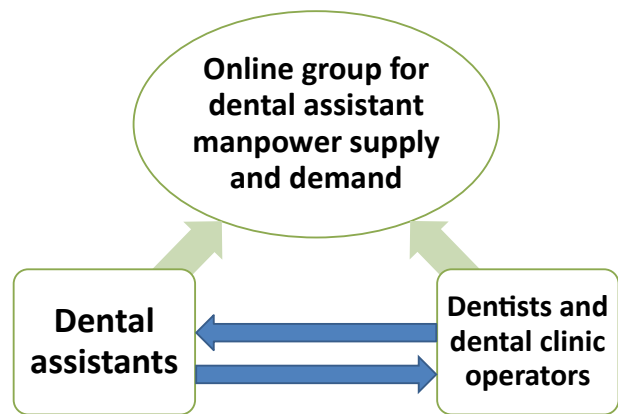
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on the results of the 2009–2013 American Community Survey (ACS), there were 180,007 dentists, 335,569 dental assistants, and 179,664 dental hygienists in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The ratios of the dental assistants and the dental hygienists to the dentists were 1.86 and 1.00, respectively. Since Taiwan has not yet implemented the dental hygienist system, the advanced dental auxiliary work is also performed by the dental assistants. Therefore, it is estimated that the ideal manpower requirement for the dental assistants may be approximately 47,000. Furthermore, among these 7040 dental clinics, about 60% have only one registered dentist, showing that most dental clinics in Taiwan were currently small-scale.<sup>1</sup> This means that most dentists must independently handle clinic management in addition to their daily dental practice. Among them, the recruitment, training, supervision, and welfare of the dental assistants are also very important links. This causes a great pressure on the dentists or the dental clinic operators.

Many people now own the mobile phones, and their use in the telecommunication is expanding due to the convenience and connectivity. Using the mobile phones for the remote consultation can play an effective role in all levels of social and economic activities.<sup>3</sup> In Taiwan, LINE is one of the most commonly used communication software. It can be downloaded to a mobile phone or a computer. It has the functions for chat, voice calls, and video calls. The users can use it to chat with friends one-on-one or in group messages, or make voice or video calls. In addition to the widespread use of one-on-one communication, the use of multi-person groups has gone beyond the function of simple communication and has been upgraded to a functional combination oriented towards the transaction processing. This article reported a new model for the dental assistant recruitment through the functionality of online community groups among the dental workers, including the dental assistants, the dentists, and the dental clinic operators.

Since 2024, the LINE community groups whose members are mainly the dental workers have been established in Taiwan one after another. These dental workers include the dental assistants and the dentists (participating in an individual capacity), as well as the dental clinic operators (who may be senior dentists or personnel supervisors). The purpose of these community groups composed of the dental workers was to provide and share information on the supply and demand of the dental assistant manpower. Among them, there were one for the whole Taiwan and several regional ones (including the Greater Taipei area and the northern, central, southern and eastern regions of Taiwan), but not the outlying island areas. Currently, as of early 2025, the Taiwan group and the Greater Taipei group had approximately 2500 and 3000 members, respectively. The number of members of other regional groups was less than 1000. In these online groups for discussion of the dental assistant manpower supply and demand, all group members could easily operate the group's conversation function using his or her mobile phone or computer anywhere, forming a three-party operation mode among the group and its members, as shown in Fig. 1.

First, the online group administrator reviewed the qualifications of applicants and maintains the basic administrative management and information security in the group, providing an open platform for all group members to discuss



**Figure 1** A new model for the dental assistant recruitment showing an online community group for discussion of the dental assistant manpower supply and demand, forming a three-party operation mode among the group and its members.

issues related to the supply and demand of the dental assistants. Secondly, the dentists and the dental clinic operators put forward the information on the manpower demand for the dental assistants. This included the basic information about the dental workplace, work benefits, work content (including the clinic counter service, dental equipment disposal, general assistant follow-up, and professional assistant follow-up) and the professional requirements (such as the ability to operate the clinic management software, general dental follow-up skills, and oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, and pediatric dentistry professional follow-up skills) and the work contract types. The types of job demand included the long-term full-time, long-term part-time, short-term part-time (usually between a few weeks and a few months), and emergency temporary work (usually a specific period of time in the near future). In addition, the dental assistants could provide the personal information, including their professional abilities, salary requirements, available working hours and matters that could be coordinated. Finally, the group members further sent the private messages to each other based on the relevant information and individual needs. The dentists and dental clinic operators gave job offers to the dental assistants, while the dental assistants applied for jobs from the dentists and dental clinic operators.

This new model for the dental assistant recruitment had the advantages of rapid matching and reduced recruitment costs. Some dental assistants who mainly worked short-term also said that this model helped them to flexibly adjust their work hours and life arrangements. Therefore, this type of online discussion group on the labor supply needs, which is mainly composed of the dental workers, will have the opportunity to continue to develop and expand in Taiwan. However, this new model faces some problems and challenges. First, the online group management must strictly control the information security and the personal information protection to prevent fraud. Secondly, a training system for the basic professional capabilities of the dental assistants needs to be established to ensure that the quality of their work can help to establish the quality and safety for the patients' dental care. Furthermore, in the case of rapid matching and changes, the dentists and the clinic operators

must provide the working conditions and environment that comply with labor laws and regulations, especially the provision of labor insurance, to ensure the basic labor rights and interests of the dental assistants.

The dental assistants are important members of the dental team as they are employed in every type of the dental practice. They are the backbone of a successful dental practice.<sup>4</sup> In view of the fact that the dental assistants have the roles of both laborers and health care providers, we suggest that in the near future, the career development of the dental assistants should be jointly promoted by the government, the third-party impartial organizations, and the groups spontaneously formed by the dental assistants to promote employment matching for the dental assistants, the unified standard education and training programs, the labor welfare rights protection, and the enhancement of professional functions and image of the dental assistants.<sup>5</sup>

### Declaration of competing interest

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

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