



## Oral health literacy strategies focused on community-based learning

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### BACKGROUND

Oral health literacy relates to the capacity of individuals to acquire, understand and to act upon oral health information to make appropriate health decisions. The objective of this work is to present the strategies under development in the community, focusing interventions of oral health literacy by the application of community-based learning models in the central region of Portugal.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the Faculty of Dental Medicine of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Viseu, Portugal), various community oral health projects have been developed focusing on oral health literacy promotion among the most vulnerable population, with the goal of achieving acceptable levels of empowerment towards adequate oral health behaviors. One of the main strategies consists in the application of the Service-Learning methodology that has allowed the identification of community needs and the active participation of dental medicine students in community interventions and scientific research in oral health.



Images 1-3: Participation of dental students in community interventions at a nursing home, focusing on the elderly and their caregivers.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Community-based learning projects can be developed to work with and for the community contributing, simultaneously, for the development of soft-skills among future oral health professionals.
- Public health strategies should be performed to improve oral health literacy within the most vulnerable risk groups of society, specifically oriented to a community-based learning model.



Images 4: Participation of dental students in community interventions at a social support institution for disabled patients with special needs.

### RESULTS

Innovative oral health community strategies should be performed to improve oral health literacy within the most vulnerable risk groups of society, specifically oriented to a community-based learning model. Service-Learning is an educational approach where the student learns specific soft skills, collaborating directly with a social institution and society “outdoors” and engages in reflection activities to deepen their understanding of what is being taught.

The community projects that are being developed at the Faculty of Dental Medicine of UCP are focused on specific risk-groups such as:

- Institutionalized elderly.
- Disabled patients with special needs.
- Vulnerable families, focused on the children.

The community interventions are based on oral health literacy with the main goal of empowerment for the adoption of better oral health behaviors to improve quality of life.

### CONCLUSIONS

One of the main strategies to incorporate the health professional in social responsibility and direct contact in community is by experiencing Service-Learning programs during their training phase. It is important to highlight that health-related degrees’ curriculum should favor community-based learning as a successful and engaging learning model that addresses both professionalism and humanism.