

Legislative Testimony
Human Services Committee
HB 5355AAC An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice Pilot Program
Tuesday, March 2, 2010
Frank L. Kuzmin, DMD

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services committee, my name is Dr. Frank L. Kuzmin and I have been practicing dentistry for 12 years in the town of Torrington. I thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony to you regarding HB 5355.

I am writing in opposition to the bill before you and I would like to take this opportunity to make you aware of some exciting facts. Did you know that in 2007 the CT Department of Oral Public Health reported that the ratio of dentist to citizens in CT is among the highest in the country? Were you also aware that there are over 1000 dentist who are Husky providers for children and adults in CT? And finally did you know that a recent PEW foundation report gave an "A" to CT for its delivery of oral health care , and only six other states received this grade? Before we jump the gun and enact a bill that would set health care back instead of forward, understand that we are already heading in the right direction.

All thirteen paragraphs of duties that this bill wishes to grant to hygienists are definitely not in the best interests of patient's access to care. It is just the opposite, to allow undertrained auxiliaries to perform duties that take dentist 8 to 10 years to master is just bad healthcare. In order for a dentist to provide the services outlined in this bill, he or she must first attend a 4 year college, excel in the sciences, then be accepted into accredited Dental School.

Once in dental school, students must master all the didactic sciences, the specific disciplines of dental care, and the practice of these skills in a non-patient preclinical environment. After becoming adequately trained in the preclinical environment and demonstrating a proficiency at the specific skills needed, they are then allowed into the clinic for true patient care. This initial clinical treatment consists of taking and reading x-rays, evaluating the oral cavity, communicating with the patient concerning their needs, and then with the help of the clinical professors, formulating a treatment plan. Once proficient at that, the students are engage in basic dental care consisting of fillings. As they continue learning in the classroom, new skill sets are introduced to the in a clinical setting, like tooth extractions, which are all surgical by the very nature of the definition of surgery- **"the practice of treating disease, injuries, or deformities by operation, esp. with instrumentation."** Without proper training on how to manage the wound site, such complications as dry socket, infection, and bleeding can become major problems for the patient.

Once all the skill sets, which are too numerous to list, are learned, the student is then expected to pass clinical proficiency tests in order to graduate. After graduation, a new dentist can still not practice dentistry until they have passed a multiple day licensing exam consisting of a written part and a practical part. After this most new graduates opt to do one to two more years of study in accredited hospital based residency programs, before heading into private practice to perform the duties that are outlined in this bill.

I hope that after reading the above information, that you can see there is much more training required then a 2 year hygiene degree, and that allowing these duties to be preformed by hygienists would be a step back in patient care.

A suggestion that I have talked about for years to help achieve more access is to build regional health care clinics for the needy. They would be staffed with recent graduates under the guidance of program directors. In return for their service, new graduates would have a portion of their school loans paid for each year of service and be given a small salary to live on while serving the needs of patients. Since the average indebtedness from dental school is 200,000 to 250,000 dollars, this becomes very attractive to new graduates trying to figure out how to pay for debt, go into private practice and succeed. Since new students are graduating every year you would never have a shortage of candidates for those positions. Also this option would also end up saving the state money, because it would cut down on the number one problem of fraud, and also reduce paperwork.

In closing, I would like to again thank the Committee for allowing me to testify before you today and would be happy to make myself available, now at any other time, should you have questions.

Sincerely,

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