

Legislative Testimony
Human Services Committee
HB 5616 AAC An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice Pilot Program
Tuesday, March 2, 2010
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Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Dr. Gary Dubin and I am a practicing General Dentist in Guilford. The Human Services committee will soon have additional language before them on HB 5616 which will suggest an increase in the scope of practice for what is being called an “Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner.” Through my written testimony I hope to illustrate for you the educational and training backgrounds that are required of the dentist, as well as that of the hygienist who is a very valuable member of our dental team.

Dentists: Doctors of Oral Health
A Team Approach

The team approach to dentistry promotes continuity of care that is comprehensive, convenient, cost effective and efficient. Members of the team include dental assistants, lab technicians and dental hygienists. Leading the team is the dentist, a doctor focused on oral health who has earned either a Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degree or a Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree, which are essentially the same.

The Dentist’s Role

Dentists are doctors who specialize in oral health. Their responsibilities include:

- Diagnosing oral diseases and recognizing symptoms and signs indicative of systemic illnesses.
- Coordinating planning and treatment with consideration of the patient’s health status, including oral manifestations of systemic illnesses and the medications used to treat them.
- Develops oral/dental treatment in conjunction and within the parameters of the patient’s health status.
- Determines how the patient’s medications will impact treatment and how treatment will impact medical status.
- Creating treatment plans to maintain or restore the oral health of their patients.
- Interpreting x-rays and diagnostic tests.
- Ensuring the safe administration of anesthetics.
- Monitoring growth and development of the teeth and jaws.
- Performing surgical procedures on the teeth, bone and soft tissues of the oral cavity.
- Managing oral trauma and other emergency situations.

Dentists’ oversight of the clinical team is critical to ensuring safe and effective oral care. Even seemingly routine procedures such as tooth extractions, preparing and placing fillings or administering anesthetics carry potential risks of complications such as infection, temporary or even permanent nerve damage, prolonged bleeding, hematomas and pain.

More than just Teeth and Gums

Dentists’ area of care include not only their patients’ teeth and gums but also the muscles of the head, neck and jaw, the tongue, salivary glands, and the nervous system of the head and neck. During a

comprehensive exam, dentists examine the teeth and gums, but they also look for lumps, swellings, discolorations, ulcerations - any abnormality. When appropriate, they perform procedures such as biopsies, diagnostic tests for chronic or infectious diseases, salivary gland function, and screening tests for oral cancer. In addition, dentists can spot early warning signs in the mouth that may indicate disease elsewhere in the body. Dentists' training also enables them to recognize situations that warrant referring patients for treatment by dental specialists or physicians.

Education and Clinical Training

The level of education and clinical training required to earn a dental degree, and the high academic standards of dental schools, are on par with those of medical schools and are essential to preparing dentists for the safe and effective practice of modern oral health care.

A UCONN dental student graduates with a total of 5,364 clinical and didactic hours. **The extensive pre-requisites, high admission standards and rigorous testing, along with those 5,364 hours are what truly makes a dentist a doctor of oral health.**

Upon completing their training, dentists must pass both a rigorous national written examination and a state or regional clinical licensing exam in order to practice. As a condition of licensure, they must meet continuing education requirements for the remainder of their careers, to keep them up-to-date on the latest scientific and clinical developments.

Dental Hygienist

In the dental office, the dentist and the dental hygienist work together to meet the oral health needs of patients. The range of services performed by hygienists varies from state to state. Some of the services provided by dental hygienists may include: patient screening procedures; such as assessment of oral health conditions, review of the health history, oral cancer screening, head and neck inspection, dental charting and taking blood pressure and pulse

They also perform the following tasks;

- ❑ Taking and developing dental radiographs (x-rays);
- ❑ Removing calculus and plaque (hard and soft deposits) from all surfaces of the teeth;
- ❑ Applying preventative materials to the teeth (e.g., sealants and fluorides);
- ❑ Teaching patients appropriate oral hygiene strategies to maintain oral health (e.g., tooth brushing, flossing and nutritional counseling);
- ❑ Counseling patients regarding good nutrition and its impact on oral health;
- ❑ Making impressions of patient's teeth for study casts (models of teeth used by dentists to evaluate patient treatment needs); and
- ❑ Performing documentation and office management activities.

Dental hygienists receive their education through academic programs at community colleges, technical colleges, dental schools or universities. The majority of community college programs take at least two years to complete, with graduates receiving associate degrees. Receipt of this degree allows a hygienist to take licensure examinations (national and state or regional), become licensed and to work in a dental office or public health setting. University-based dental hygiene programs may offer baccalaureate and master's degrees, which generally require at least two to four years of further education.

According to the American Dental Hygiene Association the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner would require a baccalaureate and 2 years master's degree. Anyone with college age children can quickly calculate the cost of that education.

Currently a hygienist with a 2 year associate's degree, working full time, can earn about \$80,000. It would only stand to reason that a person with a baccalaureate and 2 year master's degree would demand a much higher salary, probably in the range of \$120,000. This is approximately the same salary a dentist makes working in a public health setting. So where is the cost savings in developing another provider who would provide fewer services than a dentist?

I thank-you for your time and would welcome any questions that the Committee may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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