



CONNECTICUT DENTAL
ASSISTANTS ASSOCIATION

Legislative Testimony to the Public Health Committee
SB No. 993 An Act Concerning Dental Assistants and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary
Public Health Committee
Friday March 15, 2013
Beth M. Barber, COA, MADAA, BS

My name is Beth Barber. I am a Dental Assistant and National Board Certified Orthodontic Assistant, COA. The Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) is a nationally recognized certification organization for dental assistants. I am a Master of the American Dental Assistants Association (MADAA) and I have a Bachelor of Science in Biology. I also represent the Connecticut Dental Assistants Association as Immediate Past President. I would like to let you know why I support and favor **SB No. 993 “An Act Concerning Dental Assistants and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary”** and why this is so very important to the citizens of Connecticut.

First, **SB No. 993** is, and should remain, a stand-alone bill that addresses the need to recognize experience, education and training levels of dental assistants. As it is, **SB No. 993** is supported by the Connecticut State Dental Association.

SB No. 993 also addresses the very real need to mobilize a currently underutilized member of the dental team, the dental assistant, in delivering quality patient care. As far back as July 1, 2004, the Connecticut Department of Public Health established an ad hoc committee to examine and evaluate the possible changes that would improve access to oral health care, and one of those changes was expanding the functions of dental assistants. As recently as January 23, 2013, the report “Every Smile Counts” from the Connecticut Department of Public Health states: “Many children in Connecticut do not get the dental care they need.” “Dental decay continues to be a significant problem for Connecticut’s children.” “Almost 60% of children in Connecticut do not have dental sealants.” “Untreated tooth decay is also a significant problem for many vulnerable adults in Connecticut.” So, access to dental care is still an issue in Connecticut, as the current dental workforce is still not adequate to meet the needs of our citizens.

In 1993, HB No. 7097, Public Act No. 93-249 revised the scope of practice for dental assistants in Connecticut and required the taking and passing of a radiation health and safety exam prescribed by DANB by January 1, 1995, to safely expose patients to radiation. People started to realize the value of education for a dental assistant and that this was important and vital in protecting the public.

Legislation for expanded functions for dental assistants (EFDAs) in the United States was first passed in 1976 in Ohio, where these programs are still going strong today. More than 40 states have introduced and passed similar legislation. This is a tried and tested and successful concept. Current laws in many states permit the training and development of expanded functions auxiliaries at a high performance level. The traditional places in dentistry that originally defined duties of dentists, hygienists, EFDAs, and dental assistants have been fairly limited, and there appears to be some areas of crossover that would be very easy to allow the next level to perform.

Dental assistants would enroll in courses to learn and be evaluated for certain safe and reversible expanded skills under clinical settings, only in schools accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission of Dental Accreditation (CODA), thus assuring high curriculum standards. Nationally recognized and accepted written examinations would be available to evaluate this knowledge. The state of Connecticut would not need to design or administer any of these exams, so there is no cost to local governments or the state of Connecticut.

Only dental assistants certified by DANB would be eligible for expanded functions programs in Connecticut. This is because DANB will only consider an assistant to sit for the certified dental assistant exam if they meet education and experience requirements. DANB currently requires certified dental assistants to take 12 hours of approved continuing education and be current in CPR every year. The public in Connecticut would be pleased to know that education and training to perform certain safe procedures would be available to the dental assistant.

The dentist has always been and will continue to remain always in charge of the dental assistant. The dental assistant would only perform expanded functions under the supervision of the licensed dentist. A dentist would only allow a dental assistant to perform expanded skills that he or she approves of. That means that the dentist is in the office at the time the procedure has been performed, that the dentist has examined the patient, and said, yes, you may go ahead with the procedure. And once the procedure is completed the dentist will also be there to evaluate how well that procedure was carried out. This provides not only assurance of overall quality of care but also protection of public health and safety.

Allowing educated and trained dental assistants to perform certain safe procedures does not require licensing of the dental assistant in this situation, as these skills are totally and completely reversible, and the dental assistant is working under the licensed dentist at all times. No licensing means that there is no cost to local governments or the state of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health has received written support for this legislation from the Connecticut State Dental Association (September 30, 2011), American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (September 30, 2011), the Connecticut Society of Pediatric Dentists (September 30, 2011) and the Connecticut Association of Endodontists (September 30, 2011).

We present this proposal to you today as a solution in the Connecticut Department of Public Health's overall desire to improve delivery of oral healthcare to the citizens of Connecticut, a solution that will maximize all of the dental team members' productivity and allow for more of our citizens to receive dental care and at the same time provide safeguards to patients while providing an optimal level of dental care.

I urge you to vote favorably on **SB No. 993** and to please keep **SB No. 993** intact. **SB No. 993** would permit Certified Dental Assistants to practice in accordance with their education, skill and training to provide increased and cost effective access to oral healthcare for the benefit of the children, underserved and, ultimately, all patients of Connecticut.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me to submit this testimony.

Respectfully,

Beth M. Barber, COA, MADAA, BS