

2018 Sunrise Report

Scope Expansion to Allow Affiliated Practice Dental Hygienists to Supervise Dental Assistants

Submitted by the Arizona Dental Hygienists Association
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Background:

Affiliated Practice Dental Hygienists

Dental hygienists are licensed professionals who deliver preventative dental care, clean teeth, and provide educational, clinical, and therapeutic dental hygiene procedures. To obtain a dental hygiene license from the Arizona Board of Dental Examiners (BODEX), a dental hygienist must be at least 18 years of age, be of good moral character, complete an approved dental hygiene program, pass the National Board Dental Hygiene examination, pass the Western Regional Examining Board clinical examination, and pass the Arizona Jurisprudence Examination. Additionally, a registered dental hygienist must complete at least 54 credit hours of recognized continuing dental education in a triennial period.

In 2004, the legislature approved House Bill 2637 (dental hygienists; affiliated practice relationship), establishing affiliated practice relationships for dental hygienists. An affiliated practice dental hygienist (APDH) may initiate treatment and treat patients without the supervision of a dentist pursuant to their affiliated practice agreement. APDHs provide dental hygiene services in a variety of community-based settings and have been successful in helping to expanding access to oral health care for Arizonans.

To be eligible to enter into an affiliated practice relationship, a dental hygienist must have an active license in good standing and must have been actively engaged in the dental hygiene practice for at least 500 hours in each of the two years immediately preceding the affiliated practice relationship. The affiliated practice agreement must specify the settings in which the APDH may provide services as well as the services to be provided and any procedures or standing orders the APDH must follow. Patients seen by an APDH must be directed to the affiliated practice dentist for diagnosis, treatment, or planning outside the APDH's scope. Additionally, an APDH must consult with the affiliated practice dentist on any proposed treatment that is outside the scope of the agreement, prior to initiating further treatment if the patient has not been seen by the dentist within twelve months of the initial treatment by the APDH, and prior to initiating treatment on a patient presenting with a complex medical history or medication regimen.

APDHs may contract for dental hygiene services with a health care organization or facility, long-term care facility, public health institution, public or private school authority, government-sponsored program, private charitable organization, or a social service organization or program.

Dental Assistants

Dental assistants provide support services to dental operators in order to deliver more efficient dental treatment to patients. Although they are not licensed by the Arizona Board of Dental Examiners, BODEX Administrative Rule regulates the procedures and functions a dental assistant may perform under supervision of a dentist. In addition to aiding the dentist in a variety of dental procedures, dental assistants may apply sealants, apply topical fluorides, train or instruct patients in oral hygiene techniques, preventative procedures, and dietary counseling for caries and plaque control, and collect and record information pertaining to extraoral and intraoral conditions. Dental assistants may also perform coronal polishing or x-rays if they receive BODEX certification.

As a result of the 2018 passage of HB 2235 regarding dental therapy, a dental assistant may also be supervised by dental therapist as outlined in the dental therapist's collaborative practice agreement.

This proposal requests a modification of the affiliated practice dental hygienist and dental assistant statutes to allow a dental assistant to perform functions under direct supervision of an affiliated practice dental hygienist as stipulated by the affiliated practice agreement.

1. Why an increased scope of practice is beneficial, including the extent to which health care consumers need and will benefit from safe, quality care from practitioners with this scope of practice.

As of September 30, 2018, more than 2.4 million Arizonans live in federally designated dental health professional shortage areas in which less than a third of the population's oral health needs are being met. Affiliated practice dental hygienists are important members of the public health team and typically provide oral health care services to underserved populations, such as AHCCCS patients and patients in rural areas. In many settings, they are instrumental in the successful integration of medical and dental services to improve access to preventative dental care. Additionally, they also educate patients on the importance of oral healthcare and work to connect patients with dental providers. Allowing APDHs to supervise dental assistants will improve the quality and efficiency of APDH practices, enabling APDHs to serve more patients and continue to improve access to oral health care for Arizona's underserved population.

2. Whether those health professionals seeking an increased scope of practice currently have or will be required to have didactic and clinical education from accredited professional schools or training from recognized programs that prepare them to perform the proposed scope of practice, and details on what that education or training includes for that proposed scope of practice.

The current dental hygiene course of study suitably prepares APDHs to supervise dental assistants, covering all services and procedures within the dental assistant scope and much more. A dental hygiene education requires an average of 84 credit hours for an associate degree or 118 credit hours for a baccalaureate degree. In addition to general education and basic science courses, dental hygiene programs require dental sciences courses including dental anatomy, head and neck anatomy, oral embryology and histology, oral pathology, radiography, periodontology, pain control and dental materials. Additionally, required dental hygiene science courses include oral health education and preventive counseling, patient management, clinical dental hygiene, community dental health, medical and dental emergencies, practice management, and supervised instruction in pre-clinical and clinical practice. A licensed dental hygienist must complete 54 hours of continuing education in a triennial period, and an APDH must complete at least 12 of those hours in specified areas including medical emergencies. Furthermore, a dental hygienist must have at least 1000 hours of active practice to qualify to enter an affiliated practice relationship. These hours will include experience working with and being assisted by dental assistants in a dental practice.

3. Whether the subject matter of the proposed increased scope of practice is currently tested by nationally recognized and accepted examinations for applicants for professional licensure and the details of the examination relating to the increased scope of practice.

Dental hygienists licensed in Arizona must pass the National Board Dental Hygiene examination and the Western Regional Examining Board clinical examination, which cover all clinical areas relevant to supervision of dental assistants. Additionally, dental hygienists must pass the Arizona Jurisprudence Exam, which tests knowledge of scope laws pertaining to all dental professions including dental assistants.

4. The extent to which the proposed increased scope of practice will impact the practice of those who are currently licensed in this state or the entry into practice of those individuals who have relocated from other states with substantially equivalent requirements for registration, certification or licensure as this state.

The proposed scope increase will expand opportunities for employment for dental assistants currently within the state or looking to relocate from another state, and it will also increase their exposure to alternative practice models. The scope increase will not significantly impact the practice of APDHs currently licensed in the state or entry into practice for dental hygienists relocating to Arizona, except that it will allow dental hygienists from Arizona's neighboring states (all of which allow dental hygienist supervision of dental assistants) who enter into affiliated practice agreements in Arizona to continue to supervise dental assistants.

5. The extent to which implementing the proposed increased scope of practice may result in savings or a cost to this state and to the public.

This proposed scope increase will not result in additional costs to the state and may result in long-term cost-savings to the state. By enabling APDHs to serve more patients, it is likely to increase access to preventative oral health care services. In the case of AHCCCS patients, increased access to preventative oral health care services should save the state costs related to dental care and related medical issues in the long term.

6. The relevant health profession licensure laws, if any, in this or other states.

Fifteen other states allow dental hygienists to supervise dental assistants including Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia. In some states, the conditions for dental hygienist supervision of dental assistants are stipulated by a collaborative practice or affiliated practice agreement, as we are proposing, while other states have broader statutes.

7. Recommendations, if any, from the applicable regulatory entity or entities, from the department of health services and from accredited educational or training programs.

We are not aware of any recommendations on this subject.

Citations

American Dental Association, 2016-17 Survey of Allied Dental Education, 2017, retrieved from the American Dental Association (ADA) Data Center.

American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), 2012 Dental Hygiene Education Program Director Survey, 2014, ADHA.

Arizona State Board of Dental Examiners, Administrative Code, Title 32 Chapter 11, 2017.

Bureau of Health Workforce, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Fourth Quarter of Fiscal Year 2018 Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) Quarterly Summary, September 30, 2018.

Dental Practice Act, Ariz. Rev. Stat. Title 32 Chapter 11, 2018.

Oral Health Workforce Research Center, Development of a New Dental Hygiene Professional Practice Index by State, 2016, Center for Health Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, University at Albany, State University of New York.

Scottsdale Healthcare, Dental Public Health Activities & Practices, Neighborhood Outreach Action for Health Program, 2009.