



DENTAL BOARD OF QUEENSLAND

CODE OF PRACTICE #1

Practice of Dentistry by Dental Therapists and Dental Hygienists

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CODE OF PRACTICE #1

PRACTICE OF DENTISTRY BY DENTAL THERAPISTS AND DENTAL HYGIENISTS

BACKGROUND:

This Code of Practice has been developed in accordance with section 374 of *Health Practitioners (Professional Standards) Act 1999* and, pursuant to the *Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001* ("the Act") to provide for the practice of dentistry by dental therapists and dental hygienists who are registered under the act as dental auxiliary registrants.

The Dental Board of Queensland ("the Board") has developed this Code of Practice in response to a directive received on 30 October 2003 from the former Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond to prepare a Code of Practice about the duties and level of supervision for dental auxiliaries.

Dental therapists have been practising in Queensland since 1976 and dental hygienists have been practising in Queensland since 1988. This Code of Practice anticipates some evolution of the scope of practice of dental therapists and of dental hygienists and includes a number of minor changes following stakeholders' submissions.

Where registrants are unsure of the application of the legislation or this Code of Practice, they are advised to seek advice from a solicitor or the Board.

The Board greatly appreciates the input of stakeholders in developing this Code of Practice, including the following:

Health Rights Commission

Dental and Oral Health Therapist Association of Queensland Inc

Dental Hygienists Association of Australia (Queensland Branch)

Dental Practice Board of Victoria

Legislative Projects Unit, Queensland Health

Oral Health Unit, Queensland Health

New South Wales Department of Health

School of Dentistry, University of Queensland

Australian Dental Association (Queensland Branch)

Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association Inc

Dental Hygienists Association of Australia Inc

Dental Council of New Zealand

Australian Dental Association Inc

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this Code of Practice are to describe the general functions and levels of supervision referred to in the Act. This Code of Practice will assist dental auxiliaries and supervising dentists to understand how dental auxiliaries are to practise. It also assists consumers using the services of dental therapists and dental hygienists to understand their role.

PRINCIPLES OF THIS CODE OF PRACTICE:

The *Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001* provides for dental therapists and dental hygienists to practise parts of dentistry under the supervision of a dentist.

This Code of Practice assumes a team approach in the delivery of clinical dental services with a supervising dentist adopting the role of dental team leader with overall responsibility for patient care.

Within the dental team, dental therapists and dental hygienists have responsibility for the treatment they provide to patients. Dental therapists and dental hygienists must practise only those functions for which they have been formally educated.

It is the responsibility of both the dentist and the dental therapist or dental hygienist to be aware of, and to practise in accordance with the legislation and this Code of Practice. The dentist is responsible for appropriate supervision which may be provided by more than one supervising dentist. Dental therapists and dental hygienists must ensure they perform their functions with appropriate supervision.

Supervision

The level of supervision may vary commensurate with the requirements for the safety and well being of the patient, the treatment being provided, the type of practice and the education and experience of the team members. Where a team member recently graduated or is new to the team, a higher level of supervision would be necessary than where a team has been established for several years.

The key features of supervision of a dental therapist are that a supervising registrant should be available at all times:

- for advice and consultation in relation to the functions of a dental therapist; and
- for referral in relation to other matters outside the functions of the dental therapist.

The key features of supervision of a dental hygienist are that a supervising registrant should be available at all times:

- for advice and consultation in relation to the practice by the dental hygienist of functions in accordance with a written treatment plan prepared by the supervising registrant based on the dentist's initial examination of the patient;

- for support in relation to the practice by the dental hygienist of functions for patients with health or treatment complexities, usually on site;
- for advice and consultation in relation to the practice by the dental hygienist of general functions in an off site facility such as a residential care facility or hospital where a registered nurse or medical practitioner is present; and
- for referral in relation to other matters outside the functions of the dental hygienist.

General Functions

The general functions of a dental therapist shall be:

- dental examination, diagnosis and charting of coronal dental caries and gingivitis;
- prescription of bitewing radiographs to detect coronal dental caries;
- cleaning and polishing of teeth and restorations;
- removal of plaque and dental calculus;
- application and removal of rubber dam;
- administration of dental local analgesia;
- preparation of cavities in primary and secondary teeth but excluding preparations involving pins and inlays;
- restoration of primary and secondary teeth with amalgam, cement or plastic materials;
- emergency treatment of pulp exposures in secondary teeth;

- pulp therapy in vital primary teeth;
- extraction of primary teeth under local analgesia;
- application of fissure sealants.

As dental therapists have been trained to provide these functions for children aged 4-17 years they would be expected to practise on this age group.

Also, the Board has determined that dental therapists working under the prescription and direct supervision of a dentist may perform general functions (iii) and (xii) on adults.

The general functions of a dental hygienist shall be:

- application and removal of rubber dam;
- removal of sutures;
- topical application of solutions prescribed by a supervising registrant;
- removal of dental cement;
- debridement to remove deposits from teeth;
- cleaning and polishing of teeth and restorations;
- removal of periodontal packs;
- measuring and recording signs of periodontal disease;
- application of fissure sealants.

A dental auxiliary registrant must not practise any of the functions of an auxiliary that are excluded by conditions on their registration imposed under section 133F of the Act. This is because the general functions outlined in this Code of Practice may reach beyond the current education of dental therapists and dental hygienists and the Board is obliged to place

conditions on the registration of dental auxiliary registrants to exclude from each dental auxiliary registrant any general functions for which they have not been formally trained.

On review of conditions imposed under section 133F(1) of the Act, the auxiliary registrant will need to provide evidence of satisfactory completion of a formal programme of training acceptable to the Board.

Additional Functions

The Act provides for dental therapists and dental hygienists to perform additional functions prescribed in the *Dental Practitioners Registration Regulation 2001* ("the Regulation") that includes the appropriate qualification for such functions. Once such additional functions are prescribed the Board may approve the practice of additional functions by dental therapists and dental hygienists whose qualifications and experience the Board considers qualifies them to perform these functions.

The additional function of a dental therapist shall be:

1. placement of stainless steel crowns on primary teeth.

The additional functions of a dental hygienist shall be:

1. administration of dental local analgesia;
2. band sizing;
3. placement of archwire fixation;
4. removal of bands and attachments;
5. removal of archwires;
6. removal of archwire fixation.

The following qualifications are prescribed in the Regulation:

For the dental therapy additional function 1. placement of stainless steel crowns on primary teeth:

Diploma of Oral Health Therapy, University of Melbourne

For the dental hygiene additional function 1. administration of dental local analgesia:

Local Anaesthesia for Dental Hygiene Practice in Queensland, University of Queensland

Local Analgesia for Dental Hygienists, University of Melbourne

Local Anaesthesia Short Course, University of Adelaide

For the dental hygiene additional functions 2. band sizing, 5. removal of archwires and 6. removal of archwire fixation:

Bachelor of Applied Health Science (Oral Health), University of Queensland

Academic Upgrade Course for School Dental Therapists, University of Queensland

For the dental hygiene additional functions 3. placement of archwire fixation and 4. removal of bands and attachments:

Additional Orthodontic Functions for Dental Hygiene Practice in Queensland, University of Queensland

Orthodontics for Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists, University of Melbourne

DEFINITIONS:

The *Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001* provides the following definitions:

"category", in relation to registration as a dental auxiliary registrant, means any of the following:

- dental therapy;
- dental hygiene; or
- another category prescribed under a regulation.

"dental auxiliary" means a person qualified for dental auxiliary registration in one or more of the following categories:

- dental therapy;
- dental hygiene; or
- another category prescribed under a regulation.

"dental auxiliary registrant" means a person registered, under part 3, as a dental auxiliary registrant in a category or categories, but does not include a provisional dental auxiliary registrant.

"dentistry" means all or any of the following:

- diagnosis of conditions of the mouth;
- fitting or intra-oral adjustment for a person of artificial teeth or corrective or restorative dental appliances; and/or
- performance of exposure prone or irreversible procedures on a person's teeth, jaw, mouth and associated structures.

"exposure prone procedure" means

- a sub-mucosal invasion with a surgical instrument; or

- (b) a procedure dealing with sharp tissues or bone spicules in a body cavity or site.

“irreversible procedure” means a treatment, or series of treatments, that causes a permanent change to the affected hard or soft tissues.

“supervising registrant” means a registrant, other than the following -

- (a) a dental auxiliary registrant or provisional dental auxiliary registrant; or
- (b) a special purpose registrant or provisional special purpose registrant whose registration is based on a qualification as a dental auxiliary.

REFERENCES:

Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001

Health Practitioners (Professional Standards) Act 1999

These are available from the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel at web site www.legislation.qld.gov.au

NOTICE TO CONSUMERS OF THE SERVICES OF DENTAL PRACTITIONERS:

If you wish to lodge a complaint about the conduct of a dentist, dental specialist, dental therapist or dental hygienist you may do so by contacting:

Complaints Assessment Coordinator

Dental Board of Queensland
GPO Box 2438
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Tel: (07)3225 2508

Health Rights Commission

Level 18, 288 Edward Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Tel: (07) 32340272
or 1800077308 (freecall)

For further information, refer to the web site for the Board (www.dentalboard.qld.gov.au) or the Commission (www.hrc.qld.gov.au).

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