

Practice of Dentistry by Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists

Code of Practice No: C002 [2008]

Ministerial approval date: 21 January 2009

Issue date: January 2009

Next review date: January 2012



PREAMBLE

Purpose

1. This code of practice has been developed, pursuant to section 118(1)(g) of the *Health Professions Registration Act 2005* (the Act), to provide a framework for the practice of dentistry by dental hygienists and dental therapists.

Scope

2. This code describes the scope of practice of dental hygienists and dental therapists registered in Victoria. It must be read in conjunction with the Board's Information Sheet *1008[2008] Practice of Dentistry by Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists*.

REVIEW

3. This code of practice will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure it accords with legislation, national and international standards and any relevant developments in the provision of dental care.

DEFINITIONS

4. For the purposes of this code of practice:
 - (a) **Dentistry** is defined as:
 - (i) diagnosis or management of conditions of the mouth of a person;
 - (ii) performance of any invasive or irreversible procedure on the natural teeth or the parts of a person's body associated with their natural teeth;
 - (iii) provision of artificial teeth or dental appliances to a patient or insertion of artificial teeth or dental appliances for a patient;
 - (iv) making an intraoral adjustment of artificial teeth or dental appliances for a patient.
(This definition is derived from section 98(1) of the Act)
 - (b) **Dentist** means a person with current general registration as a dentist.
 - (c) **Dental hygienist** means a person with current registration as a dental hygienist.
 - (d) **Dental therapist** means a person with current registration as a dental therapist.

INTRODUCTION

5. Dental hygienists and dental therapists are members of the dental team. They are educated in and practise a sub-set of the activities included in the definition of dentistry.
6. The members of the dental team work together within their particular areas of competence, to provide the best possible care for their patients.

REQUIREMENTS

Education and Competence

7. Registered dental hygienists and dental therapists must possess at least the level of competence expected of a graduating final year dental hygiene or dental therapy student in a course of study approved by the Board as leading to a registrable qualification.
8. In assessing this level of competence, particularly in the case of applicants who have been out of the workforce for some time, the Board may take into account such matters as education, acquired skills, recency of practice and continuing professional development.

Scope of Practice

9. Dental hygienists and dental therapists work with dentists in a consultative and referral relationship and may perform only those dental procedures:

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- (a) for which they have been formally educated, in courses approved by the Board;
and
 - (b) in which they are competent.

10. Dental hygienists and dental therapists may not work as independent practitioners. They can exercise autonomous decision making in those areas in which they have been formally educated in courses approved by the Board, but they may only practise within a structured professional relationship with a dentist.

Roles and responsibilities of team members

- 11. This code envisages a team approach in the delivery of dental services.
- 12. Within the team, dental hygienists and dental therapists have responsibility for the treatment they provide to patients.
- 13. Dental hygienists and dental therapists must ensure that they practise dentistry with the level and type of support appropriate to the clinical circumstances and patient needs.
- 14. The clinical team leader must be a dentist and provide clinical support and consultation to the dental hygienist or dental therapist. The level and specific nature of this support will depend on what is required for the safety and well being of the patient, the treatment being provided, the type of practice and the education and experience of team members. These are matters for the professional judgement of the practitioners involved and may vary from case to case.
- 15. The consultation arrangements that are established and the clinical support that is provided must serve the best interests of patients.

Documented consultation procedure

- 16. The treating relationship between a patient and a dental hygienist or dental therapist must be covered by a documented procedure for the provision of clinical support by a dentist should such support become necessary. The document must specify the mechanism for consultation.
- 17. It is the dental hygienist's or dental therapist's professional responsibility to ensure that such a document exists.
- 18. All parties to the arrangement must ensure that it is consistent with the terms and conditions of their professional indemnity insurance.

NON-COMPLIANCE

- 19. The Board may take disciplinary action against practitioners who fail to comply with this code of practice.