



Good Morning Madam Chair and Members of the Health Services Committee. My name is Rachelle Gustafson, President-elect of North Dakota Dental Hygienists' Association. I am also a dental hygienist with Valley Community Health Centers in Grand Forks. I am here today to share some updates on changes that are taking place with the rules for dental professionals in North Dakota.

On April 12, 2014 the ND State Board of Dental Examiners approved some changes to the rules for the dental assistants and dental hygienists. These changes will allow for expanded functions for the dental auxiliaries. As hygienists we are in support of most of these changes, but remain uncertain on how these changes help with access to dental care in North Dakota. The new functions are required to be performed under direct or indirect supervision of a dentist. This means that a dentist will need to be on site when the expanded functions are performed and the supervising dentist will need to prep (drill) the tooth, as well as check the restoration after the dental auxiliary finishes the filling. **Due to the supervision requirements there will still be limited access to dental care in the areas where there are no dentists nearby.**

The North Dakota Dental Hygienists' Association also found it interesting to see that the Board of Dental Examiners has added changes to allow dental assistants to scale supra gingivally - which means to clean teeth above the gum tissue only. We have found no scientific research that supports the practice of cleaning only above the gum line as beneficial treatment for a patient's oral health. We are concerned that many patients may confuse having their teeth cleaned only above the gum line as a complete cleaning and therefore they will not follow up with comprehensive treatment. This concern leads us to fear that this may lead to an increase in the prevalence of periodontal disease in the state. It is extremely rare while scaling to not go below the gum line for complete removal of tarter, plaque, and debris. As the North Dakota State Board of Dental Examiners mission states, **"The North Dakota State Board of Dental Examiners protects the dental health of the citizens of North Dakota by regulating the practice of dentistry, dental hygiene, and dental assisting through the enforcement of law, rules and policies. The board requires competency and ethical behavior in all areas of the practice of dentistry."** The ND Dental Hygienists' Association is concerned that allowing these functions will not be in the best interest of the public.

Dental assistants are a valuable member of the dental team. They are trained to assist the dentist with their procedures, but they perform many other tasks within the dental office ranging from sterilization of instruments, lab work, or even performing duties at the front desk. In order for an office to function effectively and efficiently we need the dental assistants to continue to provide the care they are currently trained to do.

At this time there is a surplus of dental hygienists in North Dakota, who are already qualified to perform the function of scaling above and below the gum line. Unfortunately there are many offices that are regularly looking for dental assistants due to what we consider a shortage of assistants in North Dakota. Many dental hygienists are taking positions at offices that require them to work more hours as a dental assistant than a dental hygienist. At this time we are not convinced we are utilizing the people available in our state to help with the access issue in the best manner. In North Dakota we have people without a dental home and unable to receive the proper treatment to keep them free of dental pain and in good health.

We understand that the dental professionals in North Dakota need to find ways to help serve those with limited access to dental care. We are excited and hopeful that we can expand the education of the current dental workforce allowing the dental professionals to work efficiently to provide the best care to our citizens.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to comment today. The North Dakota Dental Hygienists' Association appreciates the work that is being done to bring dental care to all areas of the state.