

Scope of Practice

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The Dentists Act 1985 refers to two distinct groups within the dental team, the dentist and auxiliary dental workers. In keeping with contemporary nomenclature all members of the dental team will be referred to as Dental Healthcare Professionals (DHP) in this 'Scope of Practice' document.

The 'Scope of Practice' document describes the tasks that each DHP is legally entitled to carry out. However, it is understood that all of the duties listed for each DHP should only be undertaken if that DHP is trained and competent to do so. In that way each member of the dental team will practise safely and effectively in the best interests of patients.

Every DHP shall be motivated by the three-fold aim of safeguarding the health of patients, promoting the welfare of the community and maintaining the honour and integrity of the dental profession.

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Introduction

The practice of providing dental healthcare requires the application of knowledge and the exercise of judgement and skill. This practice depends on your education, competency, knowledge, the extent of your experience and your registration. Over the course of your career your scope of practice may expand or it may narrow as you focus on a specialised area. This document sets out the skills and competencies each group of registrants may have. It should help guide you, as a practitioner, in identifying your own skill set and areas for continuing professional development.

All Dental Healthcare Professionals (DHPs) must comply with the standards set out in the Health Safety and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 in addition to any statutory regulation made in accordance with this Act. They must comply also with all Codes of Practice set by the Dental Council from time to time.

DHPs should only carry out a task or type of treatment or make decisions about a patient's care if they are sure that they have the necessary skills.

DHPs should only ask someone else to carry out a task or type of treatment or make decisions about a patient's care if they are confident that that other DHP has the necessary skills.

Please note – a patient could collapse on any premises at any time, whether they have received treatment or not. It is therefore essential that ALL DHPs in direct contact with the public should be trained in dealing with medical emergencies and be competent to carry out resuscitation.

Dental Nurses

Dental nurses are Dental Healthcare Professionals who provide clinical and other support to other DHPs and to patients.

Dental work carried out by a dental nurse may only be carried out under supervision of a registered dentist.

Subject to the foregoing conditions a dental nurse is permitted to carry out the following dental work:

1. assist at the chairside during all dental procedures;
2. prepare surgeries for dental procedures;
3. prepare and sterilise dental instruments, disinfect equipment and carry out other infection control procedures following international standards and best practice;
4. record dental charting and maintain treatment records;
5. support the patient and colleagues if there is a medical emergency;
6. assist in the care of patients receiving treatment under general anaesthesia and conscious sedation;
7. assist in the taking and developing of dental radiographs;
8. take dental radiographs to the prescription of a dentist (having completed a Dental Council approved course in dental radiography);
9. give appropriate health promotion advice to patients;
10. carry out appropriate clerical and administrative duties.

Dental Nurses do not:

1. diagnose disease or treatment plan.

They do not undertake any of the skill areas described in this document as being reserved to dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, hygienists or dentists.

Orthodontic Therapists

Orthodontic Therapists are registered Dental Healthcare Professionals (DHPs) who carry out certain parts of orthodontic treatment which may only be carried out under the supervision of a dentist registered in the Orthodontic division of the Register of Dental Specialists (hereinafter referred to as an orthodontist) and any such dental work shall only be carried out after the orthodontist has examined the patient and has indicated to the orthodontic therapist the course of treatment to be provided for the patient.

Subject to the foregoing conditions an orthodontic therapist shall be permitted to undertake the following dental work:

1. supragingival cleaning and polishing of teeth. Give oral hygiene advice prior to and during orthodontic treatment;
2. take impressions, bite registration and photographs;
3. fit passive removable orthodontic appliances, including space maintainers and retainers;
4. fit active or activated removable appliances, including myofunctional appliances, after initial insertion and/or activation by the orthodontist;
5. fit orthodontic headgear, including facebows, after initial insertion by the orthodontist;
6. provide advice on the placement and care of orthodontic appliances, including the application of materials to relieve trauma or discomfort;
7. place and remove of orthodontic separators;
8. fit and cement orthodontic bands;
9. place bonded orthodontic attachments as prescribed by the orthodontist;
10. insert and ligate archwires and archwire auxiliaries as instructed by the orthodontist;
11. remove ligatures and archwires;
12. remove orthodontic bands and bonded attachments;
13. remove excess cement and adhesive following banding/bonding and debanding/debonding procedures.

All dental work carried out by an orthodontic therapist must be inspected and approved by an orthodontist before the patient leaves the practice premises.

Orthodontic therapists do not:

1. remove sub-gingival deposits;
2. give local analgesia;
3. re-cement crowns;
4. place temporary dressings;
5. place active medicaments;

as these tasks are reserved to dental hygienists and dentists.

Orthodontic therapists do not:

1. carry out laboratory work other than that listed above as that is reserved to dental technicians and clinical dental technicians
2. diagnose disease, treatment plan or activate orthodontic wires as that is reserved to dentists

Dental Hygienists

Dental Hygienists are registered Dental Healthcare Professionals (DHPs) who help patients maintain their oral health by preventing and treating gum disease and promoting good oral health behaviour.

Dental work carried out by a dental hygienist may only be carried out under the supervision of a registered dentist who has first examined the patient and who has indicated to the dental hygienist the course of treatment to be provided.

Subject to the foregoing conditions a dental hygienist is permitted to carry out the following dental work:

1. confirm medical and dental histories;
2. record the soft tissue and periodontal status;
3. clean and polish teeth;
4. provide supra and subgingival scaling including comprehensive root surface debridement and apply medicaments when indicated;
5. apply to the teeth and/or gums of appropriate prophylactic materials including solutions, gels and sealants;
6. give advice in relation to oral health, including the planning and implementation of oral health promotion programmes, smoking cessation and diet analysis in relation to the prevention of dental caries and personalised plaque control programmes;
7. re-fit crowns with temporary cement and place temporary dressings when crowns or fillings become dislodged in the course of treatment by a dental hygienist;
8. take and process dental radiographs to the prescription of a dentist (having completed a Dental Council approved course in dental radiography);
9. administer local infiltration and block anaesthesia to patients whom s/he is treating to the prescription of a dentist (having completed a Dental Council approved course in local infiltration and block anaesthesia).

When a dental hygienist administers block anaesthesia to a patient the supervising dentist must remain on the premises until the patient has been discharged.

Dental hygienists are trained to recognise dental disease but the responsibility for the diagnosis of disease rests with the dentist.

Dental hygienists do not:

1. diagnose disease;
2. restore teeth;
3. carry out pulp treatments;
4. adjust unrestored surfaces;
5. extract teeth.

These skills are reserved for dentists. Dental hygienists do not undertake any of the skill areas described in this document as being reserved to dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, orthodontic therapists or dentists.

Dental Technicians

Dental technicians are Dental Healthcare Professionals who make dental devices including dentures, crowns and bridges to the prescription of a dentist or clinical dental technician.

Subject to the foregoing conditions dental technicians may carry out the following duties:

1. work with the dentist or clinical dental technician on treatment planning and outline design;
2. design, plan and make a range of custom-made dental devices according to a prescription;
3. repair and modify dental devices;
4. perform shade taking;
5. establish infection control procedures to prevent physical, chemical and microbiological contamination in the laboratory;
6. keep full and accurate laboratory records;
7. verify and take responsibility for the quality and safety of devices leaving a laboratory.

Dental technicians do not:

1. carry out or provide any treatment directly to the public;
2. perform clinical procedures;
3. fit any appliances.

These skills are reserved for dentists and clinical dental technicians. Dental technicians do not undertake any of the skill areas described in this document as being reserved to dental nurses, dental hygienists, orthodontic therapists, clinical dental technicians or dentists

Clinical Dental Technicians (CDTs)

Clinical dental technicians are registered Dental Healthcare Professionals who provide complete dentures directly to patients and partial dentures when the patient's oral health is established through recent visits to a dentist. A CDT must only provide treatment that is in the best interest of the patient and with their consent and preferred course of treatment respected. Implant-retained removable dentures may only be provided as part of a conjoint treatment plan with a registered dentist. A CDT must refer patients to a dentist for treatment that is outside their scope of practice or if he/she is concerned about the patient's oral health.

In addition to carrying out the duties of a dental technician a clinical dental technician is permitted to carry out work on persons of eighteen years of age and over provided such dental work does not include any work on natural teeth or on living tissue.

Subject to the foregoing conditions Clinical Dental Technicians may carry out the following duties:

1. fabricate, fit, insert or fix removable denture prostheses and the clinical and laboratory work preparatory work thereto, including the establishment and maintenance of all relevant records;
2. give advice to or the attendance on patients for such purpose;
3. ongoing maintenance of the prostheses.

Clinical dental technicians do not undertake any of the skill areas described in this document as being reserved to dental nurses, dental hygienists, orthodontic therapists or dentists.

Dentists

Dentists can carry out all of the treatments within the Scope of Practice of other DHPs provided they have the required level of competence. A dentist is best placed within the dental team to provide leadership, develop a vision of patient care, promote integrity, openness and fairness within the dental team and ensure a holistic approach to the patient's care. A dentist should advance self, interpersonal and group development amongst all members of the dental team. A dentist is required to have a clear understanding of his/her economic, social and legislative environment while balancing changes within these environments with ethical principles and current scientific evidence.

A dentist is permitted to carry out the following dental work. **The degree to which a dentist may undertake these functions will be dependent on a dentist's training, competence and experience to do so.**

1. diagnose disease;
2. establish and maintain all relevant records;
3. prepare comprehensive treatment options (this is a 'strategic' role as a treatment plan can be taken to any appropriate DHP);
4. provide endodontic care;
5. provide orthodontic care;
6. prescribe and provide fixed and removable prostheses;
7. perform oral surgery;
8. carry out periodontal care treatments;
9. extract permanent and deciduous teeth;
10. prescribe and provide restorative treatment care;
11. treat patients under general anaesthesia;
12. give inhalational and intravenous conscious sedation;
13. prescribe, dispense and administer medicinal products as part of dental treatment;

14. prescribe, take and diagnose radiographs;
15. provide implants.

Dentists are strongly advised to consult the Dental Council's Guidelines on Non-Surgical Procedures if they are considering carrying out any of these procedures.