



February 11, 2015

**TO:** Deans of U.S. Dental Schools  
Directors of Advanced Dental Education Programs  
Directors of Allied Dental Education Programs  
ADEA Board of Directors  
ADEA Legislative Advisory Committee

**FROM:** Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H, ADEA President and CEO  
  
Eugene L. Anderson, Ph.D., ADEA Chief Policy Officer and Managing Vice President

**RE:** **Commission on Dental Accreditation: Dental Therapy Standards Approved but Not Yet Implemented**

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The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) approved Dental Therapy Standards at its winter meeting last week. The standards are educational requirements to provide new and established dental therapy programs with guidelines to ensure quality and to protect the public.

### **Background**

A CODA Task Force has been researching and developing dental therapy standards for the past five years based on current and proposed models of dental therapy throughout the nation and globally. The CODA Task Force reviewed and considered approximately 2,000 comments regarding dental therapy standards from various communities of interest.

### **Dental Therapy Standards**

At the CODA meeting last week, dental therapy standards were approved with only a few minor edits of the draft proposed standards. The vote was conducted via secret ballot and resulted in twenty-two votes for approval of the standards, six against and two abstentions. Below are highlights from the approved standards:

- **Program Length:** The educational program must include at least three academic years of full-time instruction or its equivalent at the postsecondary level. This is considered the minimum amount of time required to educate a dental therapist. A specific academic degree is not identified.

- **Advanced Standing:** The program has the authority to grant credit for specific prior coursework toward completion of the dental therapy program. This credit may be given to dental assistants, expanded function dental assistants and dental hygienists who are moving into a dental therapy program. Programs prerequisites and other allied dental program course work are a part of the years of full-time study.
- **Scope of Practice:** Dental therapy's minimal scope of practice is outlined in the standards by listing the competencies required within the dental therapy curriculum. Some of the assessment skills such as charting, patient referral and radiographs are listed. Preventative functions include, but are not limited to, sub-gingival scaling and dental prophylaxis, application of preventive agents and dispensing of non-narcotic medications. Restorative/surgical procedures such as simple extractions of primary teeth, fabrication of temporary crowns, pulp capping, preparation and placement of direct restorations.
- **Relation to State Statutes:** All authorized functions of a dental therapist in the state in which they practice must be included in the curriculum at the level, depth and scope required by the state.
- **Program Director:** The dental therapy program director must be a licensed dentist or a licensed dental therapist who possesses a master's or higher degree and must have a full-time administrative appointment as defined by the institution.

### **Next Steps for Implementation**

The Commission voted to notify the communities of interest (COI) that the Dental Therapy Standards will not be implemented until Criteria 2 and 5 of the Principles and Criteria Eligibility of Allied Dental Programs for Accreditation by CODA are met. Action on implementation of the standards is postponed until the summer 2015 Commission meeting so that the COI have time to submit written documentation demonstrating that Criteria 2 and 5 have been met.

Here are the definitions of Criteria 2 and 5 of the Principles and Criteria Eligibility of Allied Dental Programs for Accreditation by the Commission on Dental Accreditation as documented starting on page 50 of the CODA Evaluation & Operational Policies & Procedures Manual.

- **Criteria 2.** Has the allied dental education area been in operation for a sufficient period of time to establish benchmarks and adequately measure performance?
- **Criteria 5.** Is there evidence of need and support from the public and professional communities to sustain educational programs in the discipline?

The final version of the approved standards will be available shortly on the CODA website.

ADEA members can follow legislation related to dental therapist and other alternative workforce models at the ADEA Interactive Legislative Map. By selecting 'Alternative Workforce Models' from the dropdown menu, users can view legislation related to this topic in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

If you should require additional information, please contact Eugene L. Anderson, Ph.D., ADEA Chief Policy Officer and Managing Vice President at [AndersonE@adea.org](mailto:AndersonE@adea.org).