

ADEA Domains of Competence for the New General Dentist

Preamble

The role of the general dentist extends beyond traditional oral health care, encompassing a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that contributes to the overall health of society. General dentists collaborate with dental specialists, allied dental professionals and other health care providers to address a wide range of health issues. In fulfilling this role, they must consistently demonstrate professionalism, ethical behavior, effective communication and strong interpersonal skills. A general dentist requires a broad education in biomedical sciences, clinical sciences, and emerging technologies; a commitment to lifelong learning; and advanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities to meet both current and future healthcare challenges.

In this framework, “competency” is defined as the integration of knowledge, experience, critical thinking, problem-solving, professionalism, ethical values and technical skills needed for independent dental practice. Competence is reflected not only in the delivery of high-quality, patient-centered care and self-assessment of treatment outcomes, but also in a dentist’s performance across all domains of the profession. Competency-based dental education relies on clear, well-defined competencies supported by foundational knowledge in biomedical, behavioral, ethical, clinical sciences and informatics. Dental curricula should be designed to foster these competencies through targeted educational experiences and robust assessment methods.

In December 2023, the ADEA Council of Faculties formed the Domains of Competence (DOC) Workgroup, composed of Council members, to revise the “ADEA Competencies for the New General Dentist” first approved in 2008. The updated document is not intended to set the standard for accreditation. This document is only intended to serve as a resource and guide for pre-doctoral dental education programs developing curricula for entry-level general dentists.

The Role of the Dentist

In the evolving landscape of health care, dentists play a key role in integrated clinical practice and as leaders and advocates for community and population health. These roles include the following domains and competencies.

The Role of the Dentist in Integrated Clinical Practice

Knowledge for Practice: Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of established and emerging knowledge and the application of this knowledge to patient care.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Integrate knowledge of established and evolving biomedical, clinical, epidemiological and social-behavioral sciences and apply this knowledge to clinical decision-making.
- Critically evaluate clinical information using evidence-based methods to diagnose conditions, develop treatment plans and evaluate clinical outcomes.

- Analyze pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies, ensuring safe prescription practices, particularly for pain management, following legal and ethical guidelines as they apply to patient care.
- Elicit and interpret family history and social determinants of health to assess patient risk factors, guide treatment and improve health outcomes.

Patient Care and Procedural Skills: Demonstrate the delivery of high-quality and safe person-centered care.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Practice dentistry within their defined scope of practice and expertise* recognizing self-limits and referral to specialists when necessary.
- Perform thorough extra-oral and intra-oral clinical examination, including risk assessments, incorporating critical thinking to develop diagnoses and evidence-based treatment plans that consider patient preferences and values.
- Provide person-centered, empathetic care that addresses emotional, psychological and physical needs of patients including the ability to recognize and report signs of abuse or neglect.
- Identify and manage dental and medical emergencies, including making appropriate intra- or interprofessional referrals when necessary.
- Counsel and educate patients to maintain oral and overall health incorporating principles of health promotion and disease prevention.

*

For a detailed list of the scope of practice, see Appendix.

Dental-Medical Integration: Demonstrate an approach to care that bridges the gap between oral health and overall health.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Conduct thorough risk assessments that integrate oral and systemic health factors to guide treatment planning and care delivery.
- Identify oral manifestations of systemic diseases and modify dental treatments to safely treat patients with systemic diseases.
- Collaborate with health care professionals across disciplines to ensure coordinated, holistic patient care.
- Educate patients about the bidirectional relationship between oral and systemic health to promote understanding and proactive health management.

Informatics, Practice and Technology Management: Demonstrate appropriate use of technology.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Evaluate and apply emerging technologies to enhance patient care, clinical decision-making and treatment outcomes.
- Evaluate practice management processes, such as staffing, scheduling, billing and cybersecurity measures for safeguarding patient information.
- Use electronic health records and encrypted communication methods to support effective and secure sharing of information and care delivery.

Quality and Safety: Demonstrate the systematic application of evidence-based processes and practices to ensure optimal care delivery and the protection of both patients and health care providers.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Identify and comply with local, state, and federal regulations (OSHA, HIPAA, etc.), while applying risk management principles including informed consent and accurate record-keeping.
- Evaluate and apply basic safety design principles, such as infection control, radiation exposure safety and emergency preparedness, to reduce the risk of harm to patients and providers.
- Demonstrate the ability to follow emergency preparedness plans to ensure patient safety and continuity of care.
- Identify risks and evaluate measures to prevent errors in a health care delivery setting.

The Role of the Dentist as a Leader

Ethics and Professionalism: Demonstrate adherence to ethical principles and professional standards.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Make informed decisions that align with ethical principles and standards, ensuring patient welfare and maintaining public trust.
- Demonstrate honesty, integrity, accountability, reliability and self-regulation in clinical care by upholding patient confidentiality, ensuring informed consent and adhering to ethical business practices.
- Deliver high-quality dental care with professionalism and respect for each patient's unique background, experiences, and needs.
- Demonstrate continuous learning and self-reflection to stay updated on ethical guidelines and standards and help promote lifelong learning for the dental team to ensure high-quality patient care.
- Consistently model and support ethical behavior in both clinical practice and leadership roles.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills: Demonstrate effective communication with patients, caregivers and all members of the health care team.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Communicate effectively with patients and their families or caregivers, taking into account cultural, social and linguistic factors to promote person-centered care.
- Communicate effectively with other members of the health care team, using oral, written and electronic means.
- Conduct effective consultations with patients or caretakers while maintaining a therapeutic relationship.
- Maintain accurate documentation and apply principles of patient confidentiality and data privacy in all forms of information exchange.

Personal, Professional and Leadership Development: Cultivate lifelong learning, self-evaluation and growth as a leader within the dental field.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Prioritize self-awareness, well-being and compassionate self-care in personal and professional life.
- Reflect on strengths and areas for improvement to foster professional development.
- Evaluate and integrate emerging trends in health care to meet the evolving needs of patients and the health care environment.

- Guide clinical teams with informed, person-centered decisions, accountability for outcomes and cohesive team dynamics while effectively balancing leadership and supportive roles.
- Identify knowledge gaps and use quality improvement to enhance evidence-based care.

Intra/Interprofessional Partnerships: Collaborate effectively across various health disciplines and professions.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Work with team members to maintain a climate of shared values, ethical conduct and mutual respect.
- Use the knowledge of one's own role and team members' expertise to address individual and population health outcomes.
- Communicate in a responsive, responsible, respectful and compassionate manner with team members.
- Apply values and principles of the science of teamwork to adapt one's own role in a variety of team settings.

Competencies used with permission from Interprofessional Education Collaborative. (2023). IPEC Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice: Version 3. Washington, DC: Interprofessional Education Collaborative.

The Role of the Dentist as an Advocate for Community and Population Health

Health Promotion and Population Health: Address the health needs of the population.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Provide prevention, intervention and educational strategies for patients from varying backgrounds, with attention to cultural, linguistic, social and community-specific oral health initiatives in traditional and nontraditional practice settings.
- Address the oral health needs of resource-limited communities by participating in targeted outreach programs, supporting preventative care efforts and helping to promote oral health education initiatives.
- Describe how social, economic, and environmental factors impact oral health outcomes.

Advocacy: The active support and promotion of policies and practices that enhance both oral and general health outcomes for individuals and communities, particularly those facing health disparities.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Advocate for the oral and general health of patients and their communities, which may include collaborating with policy leaders and health care systems.
- Demonstrate awareness of how social, economic, and systemic factors, both historical and current, impact access to and quality of health care, and use this understanding to advocate for improved health outcomes of patients and communities.
- Describe how the practice of dentistry can improve patient and population health outcomes and reduce health disparities through community engagement and advocacy.
- Describe the role of dentists as advocates, including their work to advocate for themselves, their profession, their individual patients, and the communities that have faced structural and systemic health care challenges.

Access to Care and the Impact on Systemic and Environmental Factors: Refers to the fair and just opportunity for all individuals to achieve their highest level of health, recognizing the ADEA Domains of Competence for the New General Dentist

need for health care professionals to understand and address the systemic and environmental factors that influence health and access to care.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Define the domains of the social determinants of health.
- Identify how social determinants of health contribute to variations in health outcomes across populations.
- Recognize the effects of social determinants of health in their own community.
- Provide person-centered care that reflects an awareness of individual values, experiences, and community context.

Sustainable Practice: Integrating environmentally conscious practices into clinical care to minimize the environmental impact of health services while maintaining high standards of patient care.

The graduate must be competent to:

- Explain the relationship between environmental health, overall health and oral health.
- Identify the environmental impacts of dental practice and explore strategies to mitigate them.
- Apply critical thinking when selecting dental treatments and materials to support sustainable practices and reduce environmental impact.
- Describe the features of sustainable health care and how they can be integrated into dental practice.

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Appendix

Scope of Practice of Dentistry

- Prevent, diagnose and manage pain and anxiety in the dental patient.
- Prevent, diagnose and manage temporomandibular disorders.
- Prevent, diagnose and manage periodontal diseases.
- Develop and implement strategies for the clinical assessment and management of caries.
- Manage restorative procedures that preserve tooth structure, replace missing or defective tooth structure, maintain function, are esthetic and promote soft and hard tissue health.
- Diagnose and manage developmental or acquired occlusal abnormalities.
- Manage the replacement of teeth for the partially or completely edentulous patient.
- Diagnose, identify and manage pulpal and periradicular diseases.
- Diagnose and manage oral surgical treatment needs.
- Prevent, recognize and manage medical and dental emergencies.
- Evaluate outcomes of comprehensive dental care.
- Diagnose, identify and manage oral mucosal and osseous diseases.

Source:

ADEA Competencies for the New General Dentist: (As approved by the 2008 ADEA House of Delegates). *J Dent Educ.* 2017;81(7):844-847. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.0022-0337.2017.81.7.tb06299.x>

Glossary: ADEA Domains of Competence Workgroup

Competence – The ability to effectively apply a combination of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in a given context. Describing competence requires qualifiers to outline the relevant skills, context and the specific stage of training or development.¹

Competency – An observable ability of a health professional, integrating multiple components, such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Since competencies are observable, they can be measured and assessed to ensure their acquisition. Competencies can be assembled like building blocks to facilitate progressive development.¹

Competencies reflect external expectations and encompass behavior that is measurable, using absolute standards independent of other learners (criterion-related assessment).²

Competency-based Education – An outcomes-driven approach to designing, implementing, assessing and evaluating health care education programs, guided by a structured framework of competencies.¹

Competent – “Possessing the required abilities in all domains in a certain context at a defined stage of medical education or practice.”¹

Critical Thinking – “The process of assimilating and analyzing information, encompassing an interest in finding new solutions, a professional curiosity with an ability to admit to any lack of understanding, a willingness to examine beliefs, biases, and assumptions and to search for evidence that supports the acceptance, rejection or suspension of those beliefs, biases, and assumptions, and the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion.”³

Domains of Competence – “Broad, distinguishable areas of competence that in the aggregate constitute a general descriptive framework for a profession.” These include the six domains of competence described by the ACGME (Patient Care, Medical Knowledge, Professionalism, Interpersonal and Communication Skills, Systems-Based Practice, and Practice-Based Learning and Improvement) or the seven CanMEDS roles: Medical Expert, Professional, Communicator, Collaborator, Leader, Health Advocate and Scholar.⁴

Evidence-based Dentistry – “An approach to oral health care that requires the judicious integration of systematic assessments of clinically relevant scientific evidence relating to the patient’s oral and medical condition and history integrated with the dentist’s clinical expertise and the patient’s treatment needs and preferences.”³

Health Promotion – “Public health actions to protect or improve oral health and promote oral wellbeing through behavioral, educational, and enabling socioeconomic, legal, fiscal, environmental, and social measures; it involves the process of enabling individuals and communities to increase control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their health; includes education of the public to prevent chronic oral disease.”³

Person-centered Care – “The ability to identify, respect, and care about patients’ differences, values, preferences, and expressed needs; relieve pain and suffering; coordinate continuous care; listen to, clearly inform, communicate with, and educate patients; share decision making and management; and continuously advocate disease prevention, wellness, and promotion of healthy lifestyles, including a focus on population health.”³

Professionalism – The consistent and thoughtful application of communication, knowledge, technical abilities, clinical judgment, emotions, values and self-reflection in everyday practice to benefit the individuals and communities being served.⁵

Social Determinants of Health – “The conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality.”⁶

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