



The Academy of General Dentistry Position on Workforce Issues

Dentistry is a profession built upon long-established educational foundations that provide the minimum skill and knowledge level necessary to provide optimal oral health care to the public. An individual who is performing under anything less than these standards does not have the necessary educational level of an oral health professional who is capable of diagnosing and treating oral conditions.

The Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) understands that the doctor-patient relationship is critical to providing the best comprehensive care for the patient. The dentist is the doctor of oral health and therefore should be the only one who is responsible for patient diagnosis, treatment, and coordination of care. Delegation of select limited duties to existing allied dental personnel under the direct supervision of the dentist can help expand the dentist's capacity for providing care; however, only a dentist can provide definitive care and perform procedures that are surgical or that otherwise permanently alter the patient.

The AGD believes in:

- Supporting treatment that is prevention-focused and incorporates a fully trained dentist and his or her full oral health team (dental team concept). It is the dentist who decides the needs and treatment required for patients. The dentist utilizes the team to increase efficiency in order to treat more patients but without decreasing the level of care.
- Increasing the number of allied dental personnel (assistants, hygienists, expanded function dental assistants) within the dental team. These team members expand the capacity of the dentist but are not self-directing, cannot diagnose or treatment plan, and have direct oversight by the dentist.
- Increasing the knowledge, abilities, and training of allied dental personnel within the dental team by supporting selected limited expanded functions.
- Providing direct supervision for allied dental personnel within the dental team to ensure patient safety.
- Placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the dentist, not non-dentists, for safeguarding the health and safety of patients.
- Supporting state's rights and future efforts to set licensure requirements and iterate permitted procedures by auxiliaries to promote public health and safety.
- Supporting a single-tiered oral health care system in which the poor and geographically challenged are not relegated to non-dentists.
- Supporting solutions to address the under-utilization of the dental workforce and access to care. See the AGD's *White Paper on Increasing Access to and Utilization of Oral Health Care Services*.

The AGD House of Delegates unanimously reaffirmed the above workforce policies on July 8, 2010.

Therefore, in considering the current debate concerning the dental workforce, the AGD remains vigilant in its recognition that, at the end of the day, patient needs for better oral health, for quality care, and for treatment by those who are sufficiently educated to provide proper care, do NOT vary by state, and, as an organization of dedicated and educated professionals with a responsibility to the public, the AGD strongly feels that it would be negligent to simply defer this responsibility to the political tides of each state legislature. The AGD believes its core principles and values are in the best interest of its patients and the profession and it is for this reason that these principles and values will not be subject to alteration in response to outside influences and/or agendas.

Advancing the Value and Excellence of General Dentistry