

3/1/2021
House Committee on Health Care
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon, 97301

Subject: Significant Concern with HB 2528

Chair Prusak, Vice-Chairs Hayden and Salinas,

I am a dentist in general practice in Eugene, OR. I also volunteer on a part time basis at the South Lane Children's Dental Clinic, where we treat uninsured and medicaid children.
Today I write with significant concerns on the Dental Therapy bill, HB 2528.

I believe I have a unique perspective, because I have had the rare chance to work with Dental Therapists during my professional career, while residing in the United Kingdom in 2013-2015. Prior to that I had extensive experience working in predominantly Oregon Health Plan practice in Springfield, OR, so both settings were similar in their patient composition.

What I saw in England, did not put Dental Therapists in good light. Restorations that were provided by Dental Therapists were often completed with poor contours, using wrong material or even placed over frankly decayed teeth. Those restorations would often end up causing more damage to the patient, like gum problems, infection or pain, sometimes resulting in tooth loss.

Dental Therapists are often compared to Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants. However there is a less obvious distinction - Dental Therapists are providing irreversible surgical care, poor execution of which can lead to serious consequences. While few people would mind seeing a Nurse Practitioner for treating their sore throat, I think we would all agree they would not be a great choice when it comes to removing tonsils.

What I have seen makes me believe that if the Legislature were to allow the licensing of Dental Therapists in Oregon, you must ensure they are thoroughly educated through an accredited program.

Another major concern that I have about HB 2528, is the fact that the bill allows the Dental Therapists to dispense oral antibiotics without a prescription requirement.

There is a very serious problem with antibiotic overprescribing in Oregon and at least ten percent of those prescriptions come from dentists. Overprescribing is leading to antibiotic resistance and opportunistic infections - both very serious public health concerns. In reality, most dental infections can be treated through root canal treatment or extraction, without the need of dispensing antibiotics. A Dental Therapist, working under general supervision as envisioned in HB 2528, without the skill and scope to perform those treatments, will most likely resort to dispensing antibiotics for those treatments, until the patient can be seen by a licensed dentist. Antibiotics to treat dental infections should really be reserved for the most severe cases and should only be dispensed if prescribed by a licensed dentist.

Please do not move this bill out of committee without substantial revisions to ensure patient safety.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ivan P Paskalev, DMD
Eugene, OR