

1/31/2023

Dear Senator Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

Submitted by Bonnie Marshall regarding Senate Bill 441.

I, Bonnie Marshall, have been in the field of dentistry as a dental assistant since 1986. During that time, I have been a chairside assistant in a general, pedo, endo and an oral surgery office. I have also taught dental assisting and radiology at OHSU, Portland Community College, Charter College, Apollo College, Willamette Dental and Kaiser Permanente.

The shortage of dental assistants has been in play for several years. When COVID-19 came to Oregon dental assistants had to adapt to new rules with shorter hours without an increase in pay. When the world came back to "normal" dental assistants left the field due to the lack of support from the dental community to include but not limited to no respect with no increase in pay. A person at Starbucks earns about the same wage as most dental assistants. Dental assisting is a hard job consisting of chairside duties, exposing radiographs, billing, sterilization and general duties that no one else in the office wants to do; an educated professional dental assistant does it all.

The majority of Senate Bill 441 has to do with supporting education and providing for rural dental communities. However, I do not think people are being honest with the reason why people want this bill to move forward. A dentist wants to be able to hire more people and by offering an in-house training for free, a dentist can pay less. Sure, the bill will help a dentist have more in-house training available, but will it offer a dental assistant a living wage? The average dental assisting wage is \$23.45 an hour and a hygienist wage are \$45-\$67 an hour.

The last five years Portland Community College has offered a non-traditional successful part-time program for dental assisting. The attendees attend zoom classes, and the clinical training is offered in-house at PCC or in-office, on the weekends.

During the January 30, 2023, Senate testimony a question kept coming up: what are the other factors? No one wanted to be honest and state that dental assisting is a hard job and that the job does not offer a living wage.

The answer to the dental assisting shortage is to not offer free module training, it is to demand that all dental assistants be formally educated by respecting the job of dental assisting and by offering a living wage.

Respectfully,

Bonnie Marshall, RDA, CDA, EFDA, EFODA, MADAA, BS

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