

February 12, 2023

Representative Nosse and members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health Care:

My name is Kurt Ferré. I'm a graduate of Northwestern University Dental School, Chicago and have called Portland home since May, 1980. I enjoyed a 28 ½ year career with Permanente Dental Associates that served the patients of the Kaiser Dental Care Program. I retired from my practice in December 2008.

Since my retirement I have refocused my passion to public health and reducing oral health inequities for residents in Oregon. I currently serve on the Advisory Committee of Medical Teams International Mobile Dental Program and am a regular volunteer on their mobile vans in the Portland metropolitan area.

This letter is in response to the following 2 bills which will be heard by your committee:

House Bill 2996 Sponsored by Representatives PHAM H, JAVADI, BYNUM; Senator STEINER "Prohibits Oregon Board of Dentistry from requiring applicant for certification as dental assistant to pass written examination for radiological proficiency.

House Bill 3223 Sponsored by Representatives PHAM H, JAVADI: "Prohibits Oregon Board of Dentistry from requiring applicant for certification as dental assistant to pass written examination. Requires board to adopt rules to establish alternative pathways to certification."

As a practicing dentist over the last 46 years, what makes or breaks one's day is that person sitting across from me, my dental assistant. Nothing is more important than having a skilled, qualified dental assistant to facilitate delivering dental services in an efficient and compassionate manner. Yes, training a dental assistant to one's protocols and instrumentation is important, but equally important is knowing that person has passed written and practical requirements as stated by the Oregon Board of Dentistry.

I'm a proud member of the Oregon Dental Association (ODA), and I have many friends and professional colleagues within the ODA leadership. I also served on the ODA Government Relations Council (GRC) from October 2010 to December 2017.

One key lesson I learned from being on the GRC was, "If you don't have a seat at the table, you'll be on the menu." It is critical that all those involved in these 2 bills be at the table. Unfortunately, in the crafting of them, none of the persons in leadership roles for the Oregon Dental Assistant Association (ODAA) were consulted. Essentially, the ODAA was on the menu.

I appreciate the shortage of dental assistants as well as dental hygienists that can partially be blamed on the pandemic and the resultant frustration by dentists throughout Oregon. My volunteer work with MTI has also experienced a significant reduced volunteer dental assistant pool. However, work force shortages have affected most all facets of our economy. Shortages of nurses and primary care physicians is another reality in our health care delivery system.

I have a fellow dentist friend who grew up in her father's dental practice. First, she worked in the front office licking stamps on invoices; next, she became interested what her father did and sat

chairside with him learning basic assisting skills; she, then, attended a school to become a dental assistant by passing a certification exam. Ultimately, she went on to dental hygiene school, and, finally, dental school, again, passing the necessary written and practical examinations.

So, how do we correct the shortage of dental assistants? IMO, lowering the standards by eliminating required testing is a band aid at best and is an attempt at a quick fix. In the long term we need is a comprehensive training program, expanding enrollment at Oregon dental assisting schools, and supporting down to the high school level in the promotion of careers in dental assisting. In the short term I, along with the leadership in the ODAA, would support an alternative route to proficiency.

In House Bill 2996, it states, "The rules adopted by the board under subsection (2) of this section must require that an applicant complete the procedures listed in subsection (2) of this section under the supervision of a dentist licensed to practice dentistry in this state and that the applicant provide a written attestation from the dentist to confirm the applicant's successful completion of the procedures."

This is not and should not be the ultimate responsibility of a dentist. Basic safety in taking diagnostic X-rays while protecting the safety of the patient should requiring a standardized certification test prior to taking X-rays. In an alternative route, a certified examination required by the Board of Dentistry should still be required. Only after an assistant has demonstrated proficiency in chairside skills by his or her dentist and, then, passed the required test, can he or she be licensed as an expanded function dental assistant (EFDA),

Cost of exams and licensing may be a barrier for some. I believe that there can be support at the legislative level. Scholarships should be expanded to those who financially cannot afford the costs. I also believe that most dentists, after training a dental assistant via this alternative route, would help fund the monetary requirements to becoming an EFDA dental assistant.

What I recommend to this committee is to reject these 2 bills and that you ask Rep. (Dr.) Pham and Rep. (Dr.) Javadi to assemble all of the leadership stakeholders: dentists, dental assistants, and the Oregon Board of Dentistry at the table. Only, then, a true fix to the problem of the dental assistant shortage can be developed and protect the high standards that the public expects from their dental professionals.

Kind regards,

Kurt Ferré DDS