

Submitter: Lynn Murray
On Behalf Of: Concerned Healthcare Professionals of Oregon
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
Measure: HB3223

I attended and participated in the Committee Meeting on 2-13-23 and wanted to offer a rebuttal to what was said regarding bills 3223, 2979 and 2996.

HB 3223 & 2996 Rational of Supporters:

- Dentists will police themselves and their employees, so there is no need for objective examinations

Rebuttal: Though the dentists proposing these bills assert that dentists will train their dental assistants to safely perform skills, in reality this is not how it works. As an assistant for 20 years before becoming a Professor of Dental Assisting (for a total of over 40 years in dentistry), I have worked in many dental offices and I can tell you firsthand what actually happens in dental offices.

It is not the dentist who trains new assistants, (with the exception of which instrument they want and at what time in the procedure they want it) for the most part it is the existing assistant who trains new assistants. So if the existing assistant is not knowledgeable about how to perform a skill safely or well, neither will the new assistant.

As a Dental Assisting Program Director and Professor of Dental Assisting for 26 years now, (and I know from other program directors that this is true for their DA programs as well) we hear stories when students come back from their practicum offices and tell us what the assistants do in some dental practices.

Students in DA programs are taught the correct way of cleaning and sterilizing instruments to prevent the cross contamination from patient to patient that can, and sadly has, occurred in dental offices across the country. In part, patients contracting Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C, serious infections from a previous patient that have caused children to lose permanent teeth, and Legionnaire's disease and other potential diseases from dental unit waterlines. These risks are real. And specific protocols need to be in place to protect patients.

Proper cleaning and sterilization of instruments, not reusing disposable supplies on multiple patients, regular disinfection of waterlines, how to decontaminate a dental operatory, these and others are mandatory and yet are missed by many dental practices across the state because the assistants don't know or don't value infection prevention protocols; and the dentist does not realize their assistant does not know how to perform, or is not employing these imperative safety measures.

In truth, it is not the dentists that teach their new employees about safety or infection prevention. They rely on their existing employees to train their new employees. And so the safety violations can be perpetuated without the dentist even being aware. Which put patients, employees, and the dentist at risk. And yes, the dental assistant can get sued right along with the dentist. They would both be held accountable for transmitting disease from patient to patient, or other harm caused by and assistant performing and expanded function incorrectly.

Therefore, objective examinations are essential for dental assistants to prove that they understand how to perform these skills and Expanded Functions well and safely.