

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.

HB 3223 Rational of Supporters:

- Shortage of dental assistants in the workforce is caused by objective exams, and therefore, there should be no objective examinations for persons who will be performing Expanded Functions on patients.

Rebuttal: The bill supporters purposed that the dental assisting shortage is caused by objective exams that prove a person's competence to perform Expanded Functions procedures with excellence and safely. And that removing this objective requirement will solve the shortage in the workforce. This is NOT true.

I have been a dental assistant for over 40 years and I have actual behind the scenes facts that were not spoken of by the creators of these bills. I know what keeps dental assistants in the field and what assistants don't tell their dentists when they leave. In addition, there has been research undertaken by the American Dental Association and other stakeholders that prove these facts.

The shortage is real, but removing objective exams will NOT solve the problem, but will actually make it worse. To solve the dental assistant shortage it must be addressed in two ways; 1) Recruitment - It has not been an attractive career when compared to other options such as dental hygiene, so people do not chose to enter the field, 2) Retention - Those who do enter the field often do not stay a dental assistant long term.

For number one, recruitment; those interested in a dental career but do not want to become a dentist, look at the two career options, dental hygienist and dental assistant. The pay varies from one area of the state to another, however, dental hygienists make about 250% more money per hour than dental assistants do. So for one additional year of education the person can earn substantially more as a hygienist.

A dental office can run without a dental hygienist, but as you heard in testimony from the dentists yesterday, the office cannot treat patients without a dental assistant, they have to reduce hours and reschedule patients. So why is there such a disparity in wages between what dental assistants earn and dental hygienists earn?

As noted by the dentists who sponsored these bills, assistants are essential. Yet they

are paid about what Panda Express pays their fast food employees. This is the main reason the career is not more attractive. Like it or not, people go where the money is. I have had dental assistants graduate from the accredited Dental Assisting program, which took them 9 months and cost them money to do, and then return to their waitressing and nail care jobs because they paid better. How sad is that? Dentists have the ability to change this by paying their assistants more, but instead many chose not to, (or to raise the pay a dollar or two) and complain that there are not enough dental assistants. Only dentists have the ability to make this career more attractive by valuing and compensating their essential employees well. If they want more dental assistants in the pipeline, make it more attractive and they will come.

The second reason for the dental assisting shortage - retention, will be addressed on the next submission.