

Submitter: Terrence Clark  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: HB2996

In my opinion, removing the certifications will reduce the professionalism and decrease both the number of new student applications to the existing school system and seriously decrease the current dental assistant's longevity in the field. I'm concerned that the lack of dental staff isn't just because of fewer applicants, but perhaps more significantly is because they leave the field in only a few years. Right now we are considering giving the dental assistants the option of providing local anesthetics, which could help with increasing their job satisfaction and feeling of value to the team, thus increasing longevity. In contrast, I believe these two bills will significantly undermine these retention efforts and have exactly the opposite effect than they purport.

Dentists can already train anyone to be their assistant, but they cannot allow them to perform expanded functions without a standardized training and certification, especially taking X-rays. This testing is essential to provide patient safety and quality of care for all patients, at least at a minimum level of consistency and standard of care.

Right now the level of "training" a dental assistant can get on the job varies greatly from practice to practice and doctor to doctor. Under these bills, this problem will only get more profound. Obviously someone trained by a pedodontist will not have the skill set that an assistant would have working with someone who does implants, or endo, or perio, or oral surgery. There would literally be zero standards and zero consistency. The title of "dental assistant" would be meaningless, not just in Oregon, but state to state, for our very mobile young assistants.

I'm not aware of any evidence based research that indicates that dental assistant testing is a significant barrier to new entry into the workforce. I would contend that removing the certification and testing would lower the perceived value of the profession and reduce the number of applicants. Dentists are currently offering thousands of dollars as a starting bonus, certainly they could pay for the training and testing for any assistant they wanted to do expanded functions, removing this barrier, if it exists at all.

I'm also concerned this is a workaround for corporate dentistry to cut costs, without oversight on the concomitant cut in standardized quality of care.

These are my thoughts and concerns.