

HB2996

I oppose HB 2996 which would drop the requirement for dental assistants to pass a written examination for radiological proficiency. The test shows that dental assistants understand working with radiation, how to correctly use equipment and radiographic anatomy. While the radiation exposure to patients is low, you must also consider dose to the assistants. They take multiple images a day and if not done correctly the radiation dose will accumulate. Currently there are hand held radiation devices that can be used for dental x-rays. Professor David Hamby of Oregon State University did some testing of these hand-held devices and found that if not handled correctly the dental assistant can get exposure to hands, thyroid and eyes. In fact, he noted that the ads did not show correct use of these devices, so if this is what is used to teach the assistant, they will probably get significant exposure over time.

I worked teaching radiography at Portland Community College for 34 years and occasionally assisted the dental program with their radiation classes. They had classes on weekends for people trained in dental offices and now they offer these classes online. In talking to the instructors, they have a high first-time pass rate and consider the test to be a basic competency for radiation health and safety. The classes teach not only how to take x-rays but also explain why. The students will have material that they can use to study for exams and also get practice tests to prepare them. If the only training is on the job this probably does not occur, they might just be shown what to do, with no materials or practice testing. As noted, there are classes not just from PCC but other community colleges that are offered for people training in offices.

If there is a shortage of dental assistants, we must ask how is the profession encouraged? Do they go to high schools to promote the job? We did for our radiography program. Also, the low salary would discourage many, I hear that it is \$20.00/hour, which is what a waitress can get. As noted, there is a shortage in other states too. When I mentioned this bill to my dentist, he did not think it is a good idea.