

# Argumentative essay on points against hygienists practicing expanded functions

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Expanded functions is a term used in dentistry to refer to specific areas where one needs more training. Expanded functions include taking x-rays, learning to clean teeth, impressions and doing sealants. Dental assistants are required to learn basic skills such as names of tools, names of products and definitions. However, they need more training to carry out expanded functions. Dental hygienists differ from dental assistants in their job description. (Board of Dentistry, 2012)

Their academic requirements are also different in that a dental hygienist will require an associate degree or a bachelor's degree in dental health whereas a dental assistant requires only a certificate or a diploma. It also goes without saying that dental hygienists are have a more attractive remuneration when compared to dental assistants. Debate is rife on whether dental hygienists should be allowed to carry out. There are strong points for and against the argument. This essay will highlight points against hygienists practicing expanded functions.

## **Discussion**

A recent study sought to examine the impact of delegating expanded functions on the efficiency and productivity of general dental practices. The study was carried out in Colorado on 154 general dental practices. The study found that most of the sampled practices assigned numerous reversible practices that are related to the provision of prosthetic and operative services to expanded functions dental auxiliaries. However, the study found that very few of the sampled practices used dental hygienists to give local anesthesia to the patients. (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, 2012)

The study had some surprising findings; in that delegation of expanded functions had a substantial impact on the productivity and efficiency of practice. The effect was on gross billing, value-added and patient visits. Dental hygienists do not have the same level of education as dentists. More precisely, their training programs are different in terms of content. Whereas a dentist's curriculum has a holistic approach, a dental hygienist's curriculum is convergent towards dental hygiene. I therefore posit that delegating expanded functions to dental hygienists is unethical in that they are not trained to perform those functions. Therefore, it would be unethical to entrust someone in their hands. (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, 2012)

The law requires that dental hygienists can perform expanded functions under licensure after successfully completing a training course and submitting appropriate documentation. I feel that the training programs that hygienists go through in order to obtain accreditation do not wholly expose them to the dynamics of the responsibilities they undertake. For instance, the law says that a licensed hygienist can administer nitrous oxide to a patient but only if under indirect supervision of a dentist. This implies that a dentist has to authorize the procedure and still be in the premises as the hygienist performs the procedure.

The law acknowledges the sensitivity of the is procedures so much so that it has other additional rules that regard obtaining a permit to administer nitrous oxide. It also has other continuing educational requirements. The sensitive nature of the procedures should only warrant that only

professionals trained in that particular field perform them. This is because they have holistic knowledge and skills that supplementary training taken by hygienists may not provide. (Board of Dentistry, 2012)

## **Conclusion**

Patients are entitled to have the best care. It is even more imperative that patients be handled by professionals who are well trained. It would be denying the patient his/her right to the best healthcare when procedures are delegated to someone who was not initially trained in the scope in which certain procedures entail.

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, (2012). Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries

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