

Briefing Note

Proposed changes to the British Columbia Dental Technicians Regulation: Expanded Scope of Practice

The current *Dental Technicians Regulation* of British Columbia has a defined scope of practice that limits the services that may be provided by these designated health professionals. Specifically, registrants may not provide any services that require intraoral procedures or the taking of impressions. In order to provide better services to patients, the dental technicians propose an expanded scope of practice. This briefing note serves to generate discussion with key stakeholders on the proposed expanded scope of practice and its implementation. From these discussions, an application to government will be developed and submitted.

Current scope of practice from BC Regulations:

The current scope of practice is outlined in the Dental Technicians Regulation (2008), and states within section 4:

A registrant may, if the services can be performed without intraoral procedures or the taking of impressions,

- make, produce, reproduce, construct, furnish, supply, alter and repair a denture, bridge or prosthetic appliance or thing to be used in, on, in connection with, or in the treatment of a human tooth, jaw or associated structure or tissue for a person in accordance with a prescription to perform any of those services for that person, and
- make structural repairs to a removable dental prosthesis or replace teeth in a denture without a prescription

Expanded scope of practice:

In order to better meet the needs of patients by providing more accessible health care, it is proposed that the current scope of practice be expanded to allow for the inclusion of the following additional activities. This would enable Registered Dental Technicians the option of working together with the patient directly, with a referral and prescription from a health care professional on these procedures only:

- Custom shading, staining and shaping, including the associated procedures of removal of a temporary and placing a temporary back in.
- Taking of impressions
- Designing, fabricating, altering and fitting of removable dental appliances with a prescription from a referring dentist and directly delivering the final appliance to the patient.

For the purposes of colour matching or determining fit:

- fitting implant-supported prostheses.

It is proposed that the activities within this expanded scope would be considered additional “restricted” activities that would require specific authorization from the College of Dental Technicians in order for a registered dental technician to perform them. Authorization from the College would require the applicant to demonstrate to the College that they had the appropriate knowledge and competency to perform these activities.

While it would be the responsibility of the College to determine the education and competencies necessary for authorization, it is likely that the following courses would be a minimum requirement.

- Dental asepsis to control and prevent infections in both the laboratory and patient care areas
- Patient care in the dental laboratory – interactions with patients, appropriate record keeping of patient information
- Taking of impressions

Impact to current registrants

Current registrants would continue to perform the activities under the current scope of practice. For those registrants who elect to provide additional services under an expanded scope of practice, this would require completion of additional education approved by the College, and application for authorization to practice the expanded scope of activities from the College.

Why are these changes being proposed?

The role of the dental technician in providing optimal care to dental patients has been evolving due to requests from dentists and patients. Working collaboratively with dentists, many dental technicians have indicated they are being requested by dentists to provide more services directly to their patients. An expanded scope of practice in BC would enable and legitimize these requests. In Alberta, dental technicians have been able to perform an expanded scope of practice since 2004 in order to provide better care.

[see Appendix 1- Alberta Scope of Practice].

Benefits to patients:

An expanded scope of practice can provide benefits to patients:

- Patient focused dental care: Direct interaction between the patient and the dental technician can result in better quality services in comparison to a dental technician working solely from a patient's model. Through these interactions, patient expectations for comfort, fit and aesthetic qualities can be better understood and addressed.
- Increased access: Patients can attend the dental laboratory when it suits their schedule. Alternatively, for those patients who are not easily mobile such as geriatric patients in residential care facilities, a dental technician can attend to them at their facility.
- If Registered Dental Technicians [RDT's] have an expanded Scope of Practice they would also have greater business opportunities and an even greater sense of pride in their profession, making the profession more attractive to potential entrants. This would go a long way to ensuring an adequate supply of RDTs in the Province in the future to meet the needs and this in turn would be a benefit to patients. A shortage of trained RDTs in the Province, which is projected, will mean less access to proper timely dental care and possibly increased costs in the long term to both the dentist and their patients.

Benefits to dentists:

An expanded scope of practice can also benefit dentists:

- Improved patient satisfaction: Having patients interact directly with dental technicians can ensure fit, colour, and comfort of the dental appliance meets patient expectations resulting in higher satisfaction.
- Direct communication between the dental technician and the patient improves accuracy and efficiency, as information is not being translated and relayed by a third party – the dentist.
- Dentists can focus their time on providing higher level dental care to their patients.
- Having the RDT interact directly with the patient will decrease the likelihood of error and mistakes and will ultimately reduce the cost of re-makes to both the dentist and ultimately the patient. A benefit to both.
- Some dentists are already asking their labs, i.e. their RDTs, to perform some of this work and if it is actually done currently it is done "Out of Scope." This results in potential liability for both the dentist and the RDT. An expanded scope would eliminate this risk and allow the work to be done legally and professionally.
[Appendix Two contains sample letters from Dentists supporting the request for an Expanded Scope of Practice for RDTs].