

The Time is Right for an Independent Dental Hygiene Bureau To Protect the Interests of California Consumers

At long last, the stars are aligning for a distinct, independent state regulatory organization to oversee the practice of dental hygiene.

Senate Bill 1472 (Figueroa), which is currently winding its way through the State Legislature with broad-based support, would establish such a bureau. For decades, this has been a major long-term objective for our profession because it would not simply provide us the stature of other health professionals, but more importantly, that it will better ensure the health and safety of the California public.

Under current law, dental hygiene issues and oversight are the domain of the California Dental Board, a situation that has been problematic for a number of years and for a number of reasons. Most notably the current board structure:

- (1) Does not adequately reflect expertise in dental hygiene field and can therefore not represent issues of licensure, professional development and other issues pertaining to the dental hygiene profession
- (2) Is controlled by dentists and used as a political tool to block efforts from dental hygienists to expand access to care or protect consumers against decreased education for dental professionals
- (3) Does not have the time or resources to regulate our profession due to the monumental task of dealing with issues that relate to dentists

Benefits of a Dental Hygiene Bureau

Sponsored by the California Dental Hygienists' Association (CDHA), SB 1472 would result in a number of tangible benefits, including value to our profession as a whole, dental hygienists as individuals and the millions of Californians who receive and are in need of oral health care.

Good for dental hygienists – Every dental hygienist in the state deserves to be fairly represented. The current regulatory board overseeing the practice of dental hygiene, the Dental Board of California (DBC),

consists of 8 dentists, 4 public members, 1 registered dental assistant and 1 registered dental hygienist. This clearly represents an employer-based board rather than one based on equitable representation from all parties involved, including and most importantly, the consumers of California.

A dental hygiene bureau would allow for an advisory group of dental hygienists and consumers to make important decisions related to the education, licensure and practice of registered dental hygienists. These decisions would not need to be approved by the DBC.

Good for the Profession – Although a dentist founded the profession of dental hygiene in 1906, it has developed over the past century into a licensed profession with a critical role in protecting consumers from dental disease. Dental hygiene has progressed from an optional method of distributing the dentists' office workload to a broad-based, highly skilled profession, which plays a major role in providing preventive and therapeutic oral healthcare.

Having an autonomous agency that regulates the profession, including enforcement issues, is paramount to the recognition of dental hygiene as a true profession. But most importantly, it guarantees that the safety and welfare of the consumer related to dental hygiene will be addressed on a regular basis, rather than at the whim of the DBC.

Good for the Public – A dental hygiene bureau is not a declaration of independence by the women who practice dental hygiene (98% of the hygienists in California are women).

It is an opportunity for consumers to be protected by a closer review of educational standards, exam quality and disciplinary guidelines. It would allow the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) to concentrate more closely on the efforts of this group of licensed health care professionals to better serve their patients.

In addition, unlike most boards, the dental hygiene bureau will have as many public members as they

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do members of the profession giving consumers a greater voice. All of this would be done without any increased costs to the state, as the dental hygiene bureau will be funded completely by fees paid by registered dental hygienists.

Historical Background

Over the years, there has been a lot of work done to lay the foundation for SB 1472 and justify the need for an independent agency to regulate the profession of dental hygiene.

The California legislature has been reviewing the increased role of dental hygienists in the dental delivery system for more than twenty years. Since 1979, there has been legislation to review the work being done every day by registered dental hygienists in California in order to meet the overwhelming demand from vulnerable populations for preventive services which dental hygienists are uniquely suited to provide.

Ultimately, SB 1955 (Figueroa), chaptered in January 2003, stated that it was the intent of the Legislature to create an "independent board that would regulate the practice of dental hygienists." This intent was based on intensive review over several cycles by the Senate and Assembly Joint Legislative Sunset Review Committee (JLSRC) and after three years of negotiations between the California Dental Hygienists' Association (CDHA) and the California Dental Association (CDA).

The dental hygiene bureau was to be formed subsequent to moving the dental hygiene scope of practice from regulation into statute. Movement of dental hygiene duties into statute was to end all debates over scope issues and in an effort to concentrate on what is now best for the consumer - (SB 2022 (Figueroa) - chaptered January 2003).

SB 1472 has passed the Senate and is now in the Assembly. Contact your Assembly Representatives today! Phone or write a letter or email to let them know you support SB 1472. Have your family, friends and

patients contact their legislators as well. For information on how to contact your legislator, see the box at bottom of page.

In conclusion, the time is right for us to have our own regulatory agency and a dental hygiene bureau will provide this avenue. Naturopathic doctors are now regulated by a Bureau of Naturopathic Medicine and other allied professionals, such as nurses, physical therapist and occupational therapists regulate themselves. These similar professions have enjoyed added integrity to their professions and a truly representative regulatory body to enhance the quality of the care they provide for the benefit of Californians. We deserve the same.



Advocating for Change

Who to Contact

Not sure of who you should contact regarding SB 1472 or any other legislative bill of interest?

Go to: www.legislature.ca.gov

Click on the link that is called: Search by Zip Code for Your Legislator, then type in your home zip code and you will be linked to a page with your state Senator and Assembly Member contact information. This page will also have a link to that particular legislator's home page.

How to Contact

When phoning or writing (a letter or email), it is important to provide the following information:

- First paragraph should include the issue that you are writing about. Refer to the legislation by its bill number, this includes either AB or SB in front of the bill's assigned number. State clearly that you want support or opposition of the bill.
- Second paragraph includes the reasons you want your legislator to support or oppose this bill. Be brief, but speak in your own voice. Feel free to use personal stories or anecdotes to support your position.
- Closing paragraph should reiterate what you want and ask for a reply regarding their position on this issue. Thank them for their consideration and time. Be sure to:
 - Sign your letter
 - Include your full name and address.
 - Keep your letter to one page if possible

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