

The Dental Therapy Profession in Canada

Scope of Professional Practice/Competencies

This document is intended to define and describe the scope of professional practice of dental therapy and the competencies that all graduate dental therapists shall possess upon graduation from a school of dental therapy in Canada.

In Saskatchewan, dental therapists are governed by the Dental Disciplines Act 1997 and the Saskatchewan Dental Therapists Association Bylaws. All dental therapists wishing to practice in the province of Saskatchewan are required to register and license with the Saskatchewan Dental Therapists Association.

Introduction

Dental therapists are primary oral health care professionals who are trained to perform basic clinical dental treatment and preventive services within a variety of practice settings. As members of a multidisciplinary team, dental therapists provide restorative dental treatment services, disease prevention and oral health promotion programs to maintain and improve health. Dental therapists also advocate for the needs of clients, assist them in accessing care and refer them to other health professionals for services beyond the scope of the dental therapist's practice.

Education

Dental therapists are graduates of a two-year, post-secondary diploma program that is designed to provide a level of knowledge, experience and skills to deliver effective and appropriate oral health care services, within their defined scope of practice.

Dental therapists who have completed post-graduate orthodontic modules approved by the regulatory bodies may also provide basic orthodontic procedures.

Academic, pre-clinical and clinical components prepare graduate dental therapists to provide quality services in a competent, ethical and professional manner.

Practice Settings

Dental therapists practice in both private and public health settings within a general consultative/referral relationship with a dentist. Dental therapists practice in private dental clinics, government health programs, public health agencies, training institutions, First Nations organizations and other practice settings, in varying capacities as clinicians, educators, health promoters, administrators or dental consultants.

Competencies

Dental therapists are competent to provide the full range of professional services within their scope of practice. However, their practice may vary, depending upon health care legislation or employment policy that may exist within different settings or jurisdictions in Canada. Upon graduation from a school of dental therapy in Canada, dental therapists will demonstrate competency and provide the full range of professional care in the following four broad categories:

- 1. Diagnostic Dentistry**
- 2. Operative Dentistry**
- 3. Community and Preventive Dentistry**
- 4. Practice Management, Principles of Professionalism and Ethics.**

1. Diagnostic Dentistry

Dental therapists are trained to evaluate patients of all ages, diagnose dental caries and dental abscesses, recognize abnormal pathological conditions through clinical and radiographic examination, chart their dental status, develop a treatment plan and present the treatment plan to the patient to obtain informed consent.

Patient Assessment

- obtain, review and document the medical and dental history of patients
- take steps to prevent and manage medical emergencies should they arise
- the chief complaint or the reason for the patient's visit
- assess the patient's needs through a clinical examination of extra-oral and intra-oral structures
- chart the patient's dental status
- inform patients of any necessary considerations for dental treatment

Oral Diagnosis

- interpret findings from the examination
- diagnose dental caries and periapical abscesses
- recognize deviations from normal growth development
- identify common diseases of the mouth and other abnormal pathological conditions through clinical and radiographic examinations
- assess the implications of providing or withholding treatment

Treatment Planning, Case Management and Referral

- develop a comprehensive treatment plan
- inform the patient in understandable terms about the problem and its significance, and involve them in the management of their own care
- initiate dental or medical consultations when appropriate
- recognize indicators and appropriately refer patients to other dental professionals for care beyond the scope of the dental therapist

Dental Radiography

- assess the need for, select, expose and interpret dental radiographs to assist in assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning and case presentation
 - identify abnormal pathological conditions
 - recognize deviations from the normal and when it is appropriate to refer the patient to another professional
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2. Operative Dentistry

Dental therapists are trained to restore teeth to proper form, function and esthetics, perform uncomplicated extractions, recognize and manage dental/medical emergencies, post-extraction complications, and provide local anesthetics to manage pain to restore and maintain the health of the dental patient.

Restorative Dentistry

- restore teeth to proper form, function and esthetics
- select appropriate materials and techniques
- assess the need for, select and place appropriate space maintainers to reduce the impact of premature space loss
- take impressions and fabricate study models
- perform vital pulp therapy on primary teeth
- manage dental emergencies to alleviate pain

Local Anesthesia

- select the appropriate agent and technique to achieve local anesthesia to manage pain and minimize patient anxiety
- prevent, anticipate, recognize and manage medical emergencies or complications related to the use of local anesthetics, should they occur

Oral Surgery

- plan and perform extractions of primary teeth and uncomplicated extractions of permanent teeth
- place and remove sutures
- manage common intra-operative and post-extraction complications

Periodontic Techniques

- treat patients with mild to moderate periodontal disease
- perform scaling and polishing of teeth
- recognize and manage emergency periodontal conditions
- appropriately consult with or refer the patient to other professionals for care beyond the scope of the dental therapist

Infection Control

- understand and use current universal precautions and appropriate infection control practices in all aspects of patient care
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3. Community and Preventive Dentistry

Dental therapists are prepared to initiate appropriate oral health disease prevention strategies at an individual, community and societal level. As a member of the multi-disciplinary health team, dental therapists work with other professionals to maintain and improve health.

Health Education

- teach and communicate effectively at all levels to promote health and prevent oral disease

Primary Prevention

- plan, develop and initiate strategies designed to prevent oral disease from occurring

Secondary Prevention

- plan, develop and initiate strategies to minimize the impact of existing oral disease through clinical interventions and broader-based strategies

Needs Assessment

- assess and evaluate the oral health of populations, gather and interpret epidemiological data, and plan, develop and initiate oral health programs to address the identified needs

Community Development

- assist individuals, agencies and community groups to understand their oral health needs and take appropriate responsibility for and improve their own oral health

4. Practice Management, Principles of Professionalism and Ethics

Dental therapists are prepared to manage their practice and provide care using contemporary professional knowledge, judgment and skills to conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner.

- conform to codes of professional conduct and professional practice standards
- recognize the importance of and commit to lifelong learning and self-assessment to maintain competencies
- communicate effectively and appropriately with the public, patients, caregivers, parents or guardians, staff and other professionals
- respect cultural differences
- maintain accurate and complete patient records in a confidential manner
- continuously analyze patient treatment outcomes to improve patient care
- develop emergency protocols
- complete basic equipment maintenance and repair

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