

# With A Common Voice



At this time of transition as dental professionals work together to put into practise the new amendments to the *Dental Hygiene Act*, there may be some uncertainty regarding the rights and roles of each professional.

Our four organizations would like to speak with one voice and clarify our common position on two ongoing matters that have raised some questions.

In the interests of continuing collaboration between our two professions, this article will be printed in the membership magazine of each of our four organizations.

## **1** *The nature of the employee/employer relationship*

The terms of employment relationship between a dentist and dental hygienist are unique to each practice setting. The dental hygienist who is authorized by the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario (CDHO) to self-initiate needs to confer with his or her employer regarding the employer's wishes as it pertains to self-initiation.

By definition, an employment relationship means that an employer maintains the right to direct and control when and how work is performed. That is the hallmark of an employment relationship in law. However, as self-regulated professionals governed by both the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* and the *Dental Hygiene Act, 1991*, dental hygienists must comply with the CDHO regulations, standards of practice, guidelines and Code of Ethics. This responsibility in the practice of dental hygiene is not superseded by the wishes of the employer or by employment contracts.

Since the capacity to self-initiate is new, the employer should discuss with the dental hygienist his or her capacity and authority to self-initiate and what parameters might be appropriate for the practice setting. The employer should then make a determination as to whether the dental hygienist's capacity to self-initiate, if authorized, will be used in his or her practice.

## **2** *Responsibility for patient/client records*

The patient's/client's charts in the dentist's office should continue to record all verbal advice and consultations respecting the patient/client, whether done by the dental hygienist or the dentist.

Any and all written reports, relevant forms, such as the medical clearance forms and/or the medical history form, provided and/or reviewed by the dental hygienist and the dentist must be kept in the patient's/client's records in the dental office. Any examination findings must also be documented in the patient's/client's records, as well as a detailed description of all oral health care services rendered.

Original patient/client records are to be kept within the dental office. The dental hygienist must have full access to his or her patients'/clients' records and be in compliance with the CDHO records regulation. Original patient/client records must not be removed from the dental office unless the client is being seen by the practitioner external to the office. The records must then be promptly returned to the dental office.

Alternatively, the practitioner may choose to make a copy of the record for treatment purposes and then insert the new information into the permanent record upon return to the office. Maintaining a permanent repository of the record will ensure consistency and continuity of the patient's/client's overall oral health care.



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