

Policy on advanced and new areas of practice

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Introduction

The Dental Council is charged with the responsibility under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (HPCA) Act 2003 of protecting the health and safety of members of the public by providing for mechanisms to ensure that oral health practitioners are competent and fit to practise.

The Dental Council has approved the following policy on advanced and new areas of dental practice.

Legislation

Section 8 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 states that:

- (1) Every health practitioner who practises the profession in respect of which he or she is registered must have a current practising certificate issued by the responsible authority.
- (2) No health practitioner may perform a health service that forms part of a scope of practice of the profession in which he or she is registered unless he or she –
 - a) Is permitted to perform that service by his or her scope of practice; and
 - b) Performs that service in accordance with any conditions stated in his or her scope of practice
- (3) Nothing in subsection (1) or subsection (2) applies to a health practitioner who performs health services –
 - a) In an emergency; or
 - b) As part of a course of training or instruction; or
 - c) In the course of an examination, assessment, or competence review required or ordered by the responsible authority.

Scopes of Practice

The practice of dentistry involves the maintenance of health through the assessment, diagnosis, management, treatment and prevention of any disease, disorder or condition of the orofacial complex and associated structures. Further definition is set out in the "Detailed Scope for General Dental Practice".

Dental hygiene, dental therapy, dental technology and clinical dental technology practice are subsets of the practice of dentistry. Further definition of each practice is set out in the relevant "Detailed Scope of Practice".

Under the provisions of the HPCA oral health practitioners may only provide services which fall within the scope of practice within which they are registered.

Dentists registered in the general dental scope of practice may practise in all areas of dentistry subject to the boundaries of their education, training and competence. Those registered in the general dental scope of practice must not hold themselves out, either directly or by implication, as a specialist in any area of dentistry unless the Dental Council has granted them specialist registration in the relevant scope of practice.

Allied oral health professionals may practise in all areas of their registered scope/s of practice subject to the boundaries of their education, training and competence.

Competence

Guidance for practitioners

Practitioners offering services in an advanced area of their scope of practice or procedures using new techniques or equipment:

- a) Must be able to demonstrate they have the requisite education and training to undertake such services/procedures including knowledge of the relevant scientific literature. This means having documented evidence of training including formal qualifications, courses, CPD and supervised or self directed training and evidence of logged experience in the advanced or new area of practice. Education and training requirements will differ depending on the new area or practice or technique. As a minimum the Council would normally expect training to include didactic and practical components and the course or provider to have been accredited for verifiable CPD purposes.
- b) Must be aware of their professional responsibilities, as articulated in Council competency standards to:
 - formulate an evidence based treatment plan
 - understand current scientific dental related knowledge
 - analyse relevant scientific literature and apply their findings to the delivery of appropriate oral care
 - objectively assess the effectiveness of oral health strategies

This means that practitioners should be assured, based on scientific evidence, of the efficacy of new techniques/technologies before introducing them into their practice. .

- c) Must ensure the patient's informed consent for the service or procedure. The patient should be aware of the methods the practitioner been trained in and the other options available to them such as treatment by a specialist or another practitioner; must understand the nature of the service/procedure and the possible risks and side effects; and should have a realistic expectation of the results that can be achieved. There must be a clear and comprehensive record of the consent process. The patient's written consent must be obtained in the case of research or an experimental procedure
- d) Must ensure that any new technique or procedure falls within the scope of practice of their particular profession as defined by the Dental Council in the "Detailed Scopes of Practice"
- e) Should be aware of the indemnity position in relation to new techniques and procedures

Practitioners should also ensure that they are competent to provide the appropriate level of expertise in the service/procedure they are undertaking **in each specific case**. This should be done by appropriate case selection, full diagnostic information and treatment planning, and prior clinical and theoretical preparation.

Where diagnosis and treatment-planning indicate that the patient requires a level of skill greater than the practitioner is able to demonstrate, then the patient should be referred to more highly qualified colleagues for advice or treatment.

When deciding whether to treat or refer, the patient's informed consent is of paramount importance. The decision to refer may be influenced by access or economic considerations as well as clinical factors. This decision should be made in consultation with the patient. Dentists should give the patient full information on the complexity of the case, the likely outcomes of treatment by either provider, along with the relative costs.