



Learning from the International Experience : **Dental and Oral Health Therapists in Australia**

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Short history: Dental Therapy

- n 1913 proposed New Zealand
- n 1914-1921 dental dressers UK
- n 1920 New Zealand: School Dental Nurses- young women
- n 1923, 1946 Aust governments proposed - rejected
- n 1960s adopted internationally (Netherlands, Canada, Asia)

- n 1965 NHMRC recommended
- n 1966 Tasmania, South Australia : Dental Therapists
- n 1973 Labor govt expanded School DS
- n 1972 Dental Hygiene training began in SA
- n 1998-2004 Regulation reviews Australia wide
- n 1996 Oral Health Therapist “born”

Child oral health outcomes

- n Access to care- early years
 - n 90 % per 2 years
- n Epidemiology
 - n Caries free 50+%
 - n Caries rates declined
 - n Participation rates

References: AIHW DSRU studies:
Ellershaw & Spencer 2006; Armfield, Slade & Spencer 2008

Dental therapy practice 1965-2000

- n Diagnostic (oral exam & radiology)
- n Educative, Preventive
- n Clinical treatment- restorative & exo
- n Autonomous: referred beyond skills to dentist
- n Employment limited to school dental services
- n Patients aged 0-18 (at school)
- n Not registered- exempted from Acts
- n Supervision, direction, control of dentist



Private & public practice

- n 2000 onwards
 - n Registered for practice
 - n Represented on Dental Practice Boards
 - n Employment limits removed
 - n Recognition of autonomous practice
 - n Own practices
- n Research findings
 - n DTs can provide services to same quality as dentists
 - n Many DTs in mixed employment
 - n Clear role for DTs in private sector
- n Observations
 - n Dentists more accepting of roles
 - n Stronger team relationships



Numbers and regulation

Dental therapists

- n 1800
- n DT: popn=1:11,765= 7.5/100,000
- n Collaborative & referral relationship with dentist
- n Diagnose & treatment planning
- n Off site services
- n Restorative, Ortho, Preventive, OHP, Radiog, LA
- n Patients 0-18 yrs
 - n **+ 18-25 in Vic**
 - n **Adults**
 - n **in WA prescr (1973)**
 - n **New enabling legislation NT, Vic & NZ**

Dental hygienists:

- n 1000
- n DH: popn= 1:25,154 = 4.3/100,000
- n Work on prescription/autonomously
- n Diagnose & treatment planning:
 - n most off site
 - n Perio, Ortho, Preventive, OHP, Radiog, LA
- n Patients all ages



Dental Therapists Services

Age range of clients 0-18

Examination, diagnosis, treatment planning

Record signs of periodontal disease

Intra & Extra -oral radiography & radiology:

Prophylaxis; teeth and restorations;

Removal plaque & dental calculus;

Topical applic preventive/therapeutic agents

Apply/remove rubber dam;

Admin dental local analgesia;

Apply fissure sealants;

Take impressions

Oral health Ed/ hygiene Instruction

Oral health promotion

Splint to stabilise mobile teeth

Prepare cavities in prim & second teeth

Restore teeth- amalgam, cement, plastic

Stainless steel crowns; primary teeth

Emerg-pulp exposures in secondary teeth;

Pulpotomies primary & perm teeth;

Extract primary & permanent teeth

Replace avulsed teeth

Orthodontic functions - all ages

eg band sizing

removal of appliances & archwires

placement & removal of archwire fixation

Etching & sealing prep for brackets

Dental Hygienists Services

Age range of clients- all ages

Examination, diagnosis, treatment planning

Measure & record periodontal disease

Intra & Extra -oral radiography & radiology

Prophylaxis of teeth & restorations;

Remove plaque& dental calculus;

Topical applic preventive/therapeutic agents

Apply & removal rubber dam;

Administer dental local analgesia;

Apply fissure sealants;

Take impressions

Oral H Ed/hygiene instructions

Oral health promotion

Splint to stabilize a mobile tooth

Insert temporary restorations

Caries susceptibility testing

Removal of dental cement;

In surgery bleaching

Removal of sutures;

Root debridement (root planing);

Apply/remove periodontal packs

Orthodontic functions

band sizing

removal of bands and attachments,

removal of archwire

placement & removal of archwire fixation

What is an oral health therapist

- n Dental therapist + Dental hygienist?
- n A mini dentist?
- n Generic 'auxiliary'
 - n Basis in oral health
 - n Generic primary oral health care
 - § preventive, health promotion
 - § first contact- relationship development, communication
 - § assess, treat & refer
 - § special skill development- underserved areas
 - § complimentary & substitute services

n= 300 in Australia

Oral health therapists- Education

- n 8 University Bach.OH programs in Australia- 3 years
 - n 7 Oral Health Therapy, 1 B. Dental Hygiene
- n 3 single Diplomas (colleges)

Content:

- n Health promotion, public & community health
- n Evidence, ethics & profession
- n Health sciences
- n Oral exam, diagnosis, treatment planning
- n Preventive clinical therapies
- n Separate Integrated clinical streams in D Th & D Hygiene
- n Community clinical practice experience later years



How do they contribute to the oral health team ?

- n Wellness approach – improve oral health
 - n health promoting,
 - n preventive, minimal intervention first
- n Social and biomedical approaches
- n Collaborative- inside and outside oral health
- n Focus on less complex treatment services
- n Enable lower cost models of care
- n Provide care in underserved communities
- n Flexible; able to adapt to local needs

Oral health therapists can be used to...

- n Improve access to preventive services
- n Reduce bottlenecks in access to care
- n Provide more cost-effective services
- n Provide particular skill sets for particular patient groups - unmet needs
- n Create better linkages between private and public services
- n Re-orient health services
- n Remove silo approaches- increase vertical and horizontal collaborations



What's happening already?

Dental therapists

- n in pediatric specialist and orthodontic practices
- n providing treatment services under general anesthesia in hospital clinics
- n providing treatment services to physically and mentally disabled (including autistic) children
- n providing treatment for adults
- n providing treatment for children (pre, primary & youth programs)
- n In health promotion units
- n in private practices
- n in indigenous communities with patients of all ages- family centred care – dentist visits monthly
- n working independently and referring to private practices
- n in remote Aboriginal communities- dentist available on call
- n tendering to provide school dental services
- n in specialist dental units in Children's hospitals
- n in hospital cleft lip & palate programs
- n with phobic patients
- n doing outreach identification and referral for homeless, drug and alcohol dependent people, and providing treatment services
- n examining, providing treatment and referring young adults for care

Oral health therapists

- n in cancer & HIV wards,
- n providing oral cancer screening in public health & general practice
- n domiciliary and outreach services for elderly
- n employed directly by residential care settings- refer on to private dentists
- n in implant practices
- n in privately owned independent practices referring to private or public practices
- n in public & private practices
- n in health promotion units
- n seeing people straight from waiting lists in hospital primary care departments- examine, treating and referring

- n **Dental therapists, hygienists and dentists** working as part of community dental health centre programs

What else is possible?

Regulation & quality assurance

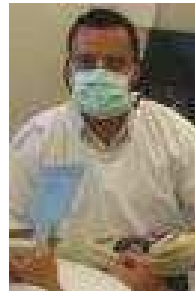
- n Quality of care must be the same in public interest
- n Regulatory frameworks common to all dental care providers
 - n Accredited education programs
 - n Continuing Prof Development & Recency of practice
 - n Informed consent, infection control etc
 - n Recognition of boundaries & appropriate referral
 - n Sanctions for un-professional conduct
 - n Professional indemnity insurance

Regulatory debates

- n Supervision/ direction/ prescription/ clinical guidance/ collaboration & referral
- n Responsibility for care provided
- n Lists /according to education
- n Protecting title/registration for OHTs

Remove regulatory barriers to the utilization of the full dental team including dentists dental therapists, dental hygienists, dental prosthetists, dental technicians, dental assistants and dental specialists ...

(Australia's Oral Health Plan, NACOH 2004)



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