



## **Commission on Dental Accreditation Adopts National Standards for Dental Therapy Training Programs**

On February 6, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) voted overwhelmingly to adopt national training standards for dental therapy education programs. The vote signaled that dentistry's accrediting body understands it is in the best interest of the dental profession and the public to develop national standards for the dental therapy education.

### **Background**

For the past five years, a CODA Task Force has been researching and developing dental therapy standards based on current and proposed dental therapy models throughout the nation and the world. The CODA Task Force reviewed and considered approximately 2,000 comments regarding dental therapy standards from various communities of interest.

### **Standards**

The standards are educational requirements to provide new and established dental therapy programs with guidelines to ensure quality, consistency and to protect the public. The final version of the approved standards will be available shortly on the CODA [website](#). Here are highlights from the approved standards:

- Program length:
  - Educational programs should have the flexibility to determine the degree awarded to program graduates
  - Dental therapists to be trained in three academic years with advanced standing granted to dental hygienists and assistants
- Supervision: Supervision levels should be set by states, but CODA removed restrictive language from past drafts that required direct supervision
- Scope of Practice: The standards set a minimal scope of practice that includes evaluative, preventive and restorative functions but highlights that states have authority to add procedures noting that education programs must provide education to support additional scope of practice
- Program Director: The dental therapy program director must be a licensed dentist or a licensed dental therapist who possesses a master's degree or higher and must have a full-time administrative appointment as defined by the institution.

### **Impact**

Standards are an important step forward for dental therapy programs and efforts to establish the practice of dental therapy in states across the country.

- Training institutions will have national and streamlined standards to shape their training programs

- Students will have the ability to enter accredited programs and be eligible for financial aid
- Accreditation will be overseen by a national accrediting body rather than on a state by state basis
- Recognition of the need for dental therapy programs and the profession nationally

### **Next Steps**

CODA voted that the Dental Therapy Standards will not be implemented until Criteria 2 and 5 of the *Principles and Criteria Eligibility of Allied Dental Programs for Accreditation by CODA* are met. Action on implementation of the standards is postponed until CODA meets on June 1 – allowing communities of interest time to demonstrate the criteria has been met.

The definitions of Criteria 2 and 5 are:

- Criteria 2: Has the allied dental education area been in operation for a sufficient period of time to establish benchmarks and adequately measure performance?
- Criteria 5: Is there evidence of need and support from the public and professional communities to sustain educational programs in the discipline?

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