

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528 March 4, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

For the record, my name is Pamela Lynch and I reside in Tigard, OR. I am an Expanded Practice dental hygienist and owner of About Face Dental Hygiene Spa, Portland, OR, an independent dental hygiene and spa practice, serving underserved/ uninsured dental patients. I also work as an independent temporary/fill-in dental hygienist in the Portland Metro Area.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon. There is a shortage of dentists in Oregon, even in Portland, to keep up with the demand. Restorative and surgical procedures take time, the more complicated, the more time is needed. Please also keep in mind, dentists typically work only 4 days a week.

HPSA map showing Oregon's Dental Professional Shortage Areas: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/2016-Dental-HPSA-Map.pdf>

A dentist can only treat one patient at a time in an 8 hour day. Depending on the procedure, a dentist may be able to treat at most (on average) 5 to 8 patients a day. If a procedure is complicated, it may take longer than an hour, thus being able to treat less than 8 patients in a day. *Please also keep in mind that many restorative procedures require more than 1 appointment to complete.* At best, this equates to 8 hours per day x 4 days per week = 32 patients a week at the most. Estimating for a year, factoring in vacation time, 48 weeks x 32 patients per week = 1,536 maximum average of patients treated per year.

The bottom line, there is a finite number of patients a dentist can treat. The demand for dental restorative care outpaces the number of licensed dentists.

With the passing of Senate Bill 2528, a dental therapist, *under the supervision of a dentist*, would be able to provide uncomplicated restorative care and thus halting dental caries that, if left untreated will result in patient discomfort, a more complicated procedure, and substantially higher procedure cost.

Access to Care

- Dental therapists will work with dentists the way that a physician assistant works with a dentist
- Dental therapists will provide basic restorative dental services which will free up their dentist to provide more complex restorative dental services
- Dental therapists can help dentists provide more dental care to more people at a lower cost

Education

- This bill will require dental therapists to have completed a dental pilot project, a CODA-accredited dental therapy education program, or a dental therapy education program that is substantially equivalent to a CODA-accredited program and that has been approved by the Oregon Board of Dentistry.
- CODA accreditation standards require that dental therapy education programs include at least three academic years of full-time instruction or its equivalent at the college-level which is one year longer than the CODA accreditation standard for dental hygiene education programs.

Quality of Care

- This bill allows the Oregon Board of Dentistry to require written, lab, or clinical exams to test the professional knowledge & skills of applicants for a dental therapy license.
- This bill requires dental therapists to work under the supervision of a dentist per a very detailed practice agreement
- Dental therapists will only be allowed to do what their supervising dentist allows them to do

- Dentists will only delegate procedures to a dental therapist if they believe it is safe & appropriate for the patient.

Evidence

- Patient data from the past 10 years shows that dental clinics in Minnesota that employ dental therapists see more patients, provide more services, and increase gross revenues according to a study from the Pew Charitable Trusts
- Dental Pilot Project #100 has shown that dental therapists in Oregon can provide safe & appropriate dental care under the supervision of a dentist.

“The American Dental Association reported that nearly 30 percent of people ages 18 to 34 revealed that the appearances of their teeth and mouths held them back in their abilities to successfully interview for jobs.”

<http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/US-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf?la=en>

“Benefits of Early Dental Care Now Hard to Refute”

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2727996>

“Dental Care Presents The Highest Level Of Financial Barriers, Compared To Other Types Of Health Care Services” <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0800>

The Oregon Dental Hygienists’ Association supports this bill. Please feel free to contact me regarding the role beneficial role of the Dental Therapist and expanding the scope of care for Expanded Practice Dental Hygienists.

In closing, I urge you to support House Bill 2528 because it will allow dentists to work with dental therapists to expand access to much needed dental care in Oregon.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,

Pamela Lynch, BSDH, EPDH, LAe

Pronouns: she, her, hers

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