

House bill 2996 “Prohibits Oregon Board of Dentistry from requiring applicant for certification as dental assistant to pass written examination for radiological proficiency”. Simply put, it does not allow the Oregon Board of Dentistry (OBD) to require dental assisting applicants to pass the Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) board exam that covers how to expose dental x-rays safely for themselves and the public.

“The Mission of the Oregon Board of Dentistry is to promote quality oral health care and protect all communities in the State of Oregon by equitably and ethically regulating dental professionals.” One of the ways the board does this is by “Testing the competency of applicants through written and clinical examinations.”

This bill, if passed, will remove the current requirement that dental assistants demonstrate knowledge of safety when exposing patients to ionizing radiation by passing the Radiation Health and SAFETY exam. This is a national examination through the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) that covers how to achieve diagnostic images to avoid retakes and ways to protect themselves and patients from unnecessary radiation.

Ionizing radiation is a necessary diagnostic tool. However, it is cumulative. It builds in the body over time and is linked to cell damage, including DNA, and cancer. Yes, through digital radiography we have been able to reduce the levels of radiation exposed, and this is what we should strive to do – provide more and more protection for healthcare professionals and the public. We should NOT work on one hand to safeguard them, and with the other hand carelessly remove the oversight that ensures their protection. I have heard it expressed that dental radiographs provide no more radiation than an airplane ride. Perhaps, if done correctly, so as to avoid a bunch of retakes. That is for the patient. What about the dental assistant that exposes the radiation multiple times a day, day after day, week after week, year after year? How do we know that they understand the ways to not only protect their patients through safe and accurate techniques, but also how to protect themselves?

They demonstrate this knowledge by passing the Radiation HEALTH and SAFETY exam. We allow the Oregon Board of Dentistry to do their job “equitably and ethically regulating dental professionals.” (This is exactly what they did in November 2022 when they decided NOT to move this proposal forward when it was presented to them).

For decades, car manufacturers have endeavored to create safer cars. Should Oregon also stop requiring drivers from taking examinations for applicants to show they understand how to protect themselves and others on the road? Of course not! It would be absurd to remove that oversight.

Why would we remove the only safeguard to radiation over-exposure in dental offices?

As a dental assistant of more than 40 years, and a dental assisting radiology educator for 20, I strongly oppose HB 2996 that prohibits the Oregon Dental Board from requiring assistants to take the Radiation Health and Safety Exam.

For the safety of all Oregonians, please do not pass HB 2996!

Respectfully,  
Leslie Greer