

RE: Practice Site Expansion Regs for PHDHP 16A-4633, Expansion of Practice Sites for the Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner, IRRC #3228



Dear Independent Regulatory Review Commission,

I am a Registered Dental Hygienist and Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner, with over 40 years' experience in dental hygiene. I am writing to endorse the proposed regulation, 16A-4633, Expansion of Practice Sites for the Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner.

We are all continuing to better understand the research and the reality that oral health IS essential to overall health. We appreciate, but may take for granted, a pain free, healthy dentition, the ability to chew our food, the satisfaction of a smile contributing to our self-image, and the importance of the ability to access dental care. It is, *however*, well-documented that children in underserved communities have disproportionately less access to dental care. Adopting the proposed changes to expand practice sites will support a synergistic effort across medical and dental professions to improve access to care and help to address the dilemma of poor oral health in underserved communities.

A workforce of qualified Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners (PHDHPs) positioned in these sites has the opportunity to provide early intervention preventive dental services and referrals to dental homes for increased utilization of dental care. While there has been anecdotal acknowledgement that PHDHPs can make a difference, a recent peer-reviewed study, conducted in Pennsylvania: "Success Rates of Pediatric Dental Referrals Made by Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners" was recently made available online by the Journal of Public Health Dentistry. This study found that children with dental caries (tooth decay) had 5.7 times greater odds of successful referral from the Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner, co-located in a medical setting, to the pediatric dentist compared to children without dental caries. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of a coordinated effort across medicine and dentistry using PHDHPs to decrease family's barriers to accessing dental care by pediatric dentists, particularly for children with dental caries.

Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners have strong educational backgrounds in health promotion and disease prevention, as well as clinical experience in the

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community. They are effective communicators, collaborators, educators, and motivators. They conscientiously work to educate children, their guardians, and our communities. Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners build coalitions to identify dental homes for children and are committed to the welfare of underserved populations. For these reasons, I support passing regulation #16A-4633 because it is an important opportunity to improve access to services that reduce oral health disparities and improve the oral health of our most vulnerable population.

Respectfully submitted,

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