

Dental Hygienists Hail Passage of Omnibus Oral Health Bill Allowing Greater Access to Oral Health Care

On January 15, 2009 as one of the final acts in the 2006-2008 legislative session, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law landmark legislation that for the first time, allowed registered dental hygienists, without the supervision of a dentist, the ability to see patients in public health settings such as schools, community health centers, and nursing homes. Chapter 530 of the Acts of 2008 – AN ACT TO IMPROVE, PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE ORAL HEALTH OF THE COMMONWEALTH. This changes allows Massachusetts Hygienists to practice as Public Health Dental Hygienists “PHDH.”

This bill was sponsored by State Senator Harriette L. Chandler, D-Worcester. This change in law was initiated by hygienists who were troubled by the fact that thousands of residents in Massachusetts, primarily of lower income, were lacking access to either a dentist or a hygienist. Massachusetts hygienists have now joined 30 other states in providing these important preventive oral health care services.

The Commonwealth requirements for PHDH practice are as follows:

- You must be a Massachusetts Registered dental hygienist who has practiced full time for at least three years or 4,500 hours.
- Complete a 4 hour continuing education course.
- Complete a minimum of six hours of hands-on experience working in a public health setting.
- Enter into a collaborative agreement with a Massachusetts licensed dentist.
- In some cases, a portable dental operations permit is require through the state Board of Registration in Dentistry. For more information visit the Massachusetts Health and Human Services website.

Watch for future dates and more information about the PHDH Continuing Education Classes.