

<b>HEALTH PROFESSIONS LICENSING AUTHORITY</b>	
<b>TITLE: Code of Practice for Dental Therapists and Dental Hygienists</b>	
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE: December 2004</b>	<b>REVIEW DATE: August 2007</b>
<b>NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW: August 2009</b>	
<b>BOARD: Dental Board of the Northern Territory</b>	

### **Objective**

Pursuant to Section 12 of the *Health Practitioners Act 2004* (the Act), this Code of Practice provides guidance for the practice of dentistry by dental therapists and dental hygienists registered in the Northern Territory.

### **Introduction**

Dental therapists and dental hygienists are members of the dental team. They are educated in and practise a sub-set of the activities included in the definition of dentistry. Members of the dental team work together within their particular areas of competence, to provide the best possible care for their patients.

### **Requirements**

Dental therapists and dental hygienists must possess at least the level of competence expected of a graduating final year student in a course of study approved by the Board. In assessing this level of competence, the Board may take in to account education, acquired skills, recency of practice and continuing professional development.

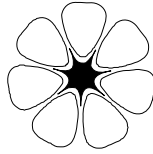
### **Scope of practice**

Dental therapists and dental hygienists work with dentists and dental specialists in a consultative and referral relationship to provide any or all of the following: preventive, periodontal, restorative and orthodontic dental services. Dental therapists and dental hygienists may perform only those facets of dentistry for which they have been formally educated and in which they are competent.

Dental therapists may provide dental services to all children and adolescents up to the age of 18 years; there is no age restriction on the provision of orthodontic procedures by dental therapists.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Dental therapists and dental hygienists must ensure that they practise dentistry with the level and type of support appropriate to the clinical circumstances and patient needs. A registered dentist or dental specialist must be the clinical team leader and provide clinical support to the dental therapist or dental hygienist. The level and nature of this support will depend on what is required for the safety and wellbeing of the patient, the treatment being provided, the type of practice and the education and experience of team members. These are matters for the professional judgement of the practitioners involved and may vary from case to case. A registered dentist or



dental specialist must be available to provide clinical consultation, or for referral if necessary.

### **Supervision**

Section 40(2)(c)(i) of the Act provides that a person who is registered as a dental therapist or dental hygienist is authorised to practise in the Territory “under the direct or indirect supervision of a person who is registered as a dentist or dental specialist.” The Act defines supervision to “include oversight, direction, guidance and support.” The minimum supervision requirements are as follows: -

For the first 3 months (full time equivalent) following graduation, dental therapists and dental hygienists must be provided with direct onsite supervision by the supervising dentist or dental specialist. Direct supervision occurs when the supervising dentist or dental specialist is actually on the same premises as the dental therapist or dental hygienist and is able to work alongside the dental therapist or dental hygienist and provide immediate chairside assistance and interventions as required.

After 3 months, indirect supervision may be introduced. Indirect supervision occurs when the supervising dentist or dental specialist ensures that they are reasonably available for consultation and referrals; and if required, can facilitate the timely provision of appropriate oversight, direction, guidance or support to the dental therapist or dental hygienist. Indirect supervision occurs when the supervising dentist or dental specialist ensures that they are reasonably available for consultation and to facilitate the provision of onsite assistance in a timely manner, if required.

### **Agreement**

The treating relationship between a patient and a dental therapist or dental hygienist should be covered by a formal written agreement for the provision of clinical support by a dentist or dental specialist should such support become necessary. The agreement must specify the mechanism for consultation.

### **Non-compliance**

The Board may take disciplinary action against practitioners who fail to comply with this Code of Practice.