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It Isn't the Right Issue, the Right Time, or the Right Model: Massachusetts Does Not Need ADHP
H.274/S.998 – An Act Establishing an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner Level of Practice

The Massachusetts Dental Society (“MDS”) represents approximately 4,800 dentists in the Commonwealth, or about 85% of the dentists in the state. The MDS has worked closely with the Legislature and MassHealth to expand access to care, most recently doubling the number of its members who participate in the MassHealth program in just 4 years. The MDS supports ongoing efforts to increase access to dental care, but strongly opposes legislation creating an advanced dental hygiene practitioner (“ADHP”) level of practice for the following reasons:

It Isn't the Right Issue

- According to MassHealth, 96% of all MassHealth member-patients have two dental practices that are actively accepting MassHealth patients within 5 miles of their home
- A survey conducted by MassHealth of members who had not visited a dentist within a year revealed that 84% of respondents listed a reason other than an inability to find a dentist
- In FY08 MassHealth averaged over 5,000 calls per month from members looking for information about participating dentists; in February of 2013 they received just 49 calls
- Massachusetts continues to be a national leader in the utilization of dental benefits by Medicaid (MassHealth) members
- The issue is not a lack of providers, but rather the need to better connect patients with a dental home and the ADHP model does not address this issue.

It Isn't the Right Time

- Regulations expanding the practice of dental assistants, thus increasing efficiency, lowering costs, and providing more access opportunities, have still not been promulgated, despite the passage of an enabling statute over 4 years ago
- The Department of Public Health (“DPH”) has not yet provided a detailed report on the Public Health Dental Hygienist (“PHDH”) program and whether that program has been a success
- The Commission on Dental Accreditation (“CODA”) has not yet completed work on accreditation standard for dental therapists and it is unlikely that an educational program is going to invest in equipment and faculty until there are national accreditation standards in place
- Until the above mentioned work is completed, it is simply not the time to consider a mid-level provider model here in Massachusetts.

It Isn't the Right Model

- The ADHP is not a natural extension of the PHDH; where the PHDH delivers preventative care and dental education with a referral back to a permanent dental home, the ADHP would deliver limited restorative care without the continuum of care of a dental home
- The ADHP would need to complete a master's level program, or approximately 6 years of post-secondary education (only two less than a dentist); most hygienists have an associate's degree, meaning that they would need 4 more years of education to become a ADHP at an estimated additional cost of approximately \$20,000 per year

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- A more effective model in Massachusetts would be the Community Dental Health Worker (“CDHW”) who conducts community-based outreach to link residents with a permanent dental home and is the natural extension of the PHDH model

The MDS opposes legislation creating an ADHP level of practice. The proposed model does not address the need to connect patients with a comprehensive dental home, does not take into account ongoing efforts regarding the dental workforce, and will not result in lower cost or better patient outcomes. The MDS urges the legislature to send this bill to study and to work with the MDS in our continued efforts to address the oral health needs of the residents of the Commonwealth.