

Memorandum

TO: Representative Donna Sweaney, Chair, House Committee on Government Operations

FROM: Harry Chen, MD, Commissioner 

DATE: April 18, 2016

SUBJECT: S.20 Follow up

Thank you for inviting me to testify last week on the future public health benefits that S. 20, a bill Related to Establishing and Regulating Dental Therapists would provide to Vermonters. Since testifying on Thursday, I have become aware of the distribution of the attached post card to some Vermonters. The information on the card concerns me enough that I wish to respond with the following information as your Committee continues to review this important bill.

1. *"Experimental Plan"* S.20 does not provide for an experimental plan. It creates a new licensing category of dental providers who would be regulated by the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation as dentists and physicians are. It is a strategy that has been successfully implemented in two states and fifty other countries, in some locations for many years.
2. *"Lowering the standard of dental care"* The bill does not lower the standard of care. Rather, it will create a new category of provider who can perform a specified range of services under the supervision of a dentist. By so doing, dental care will be more efficient and Vermont dentists can perform higher level treatments while dental therapists perform more routine procedures.
 - This provider category has been implemented effectively and researched both internationally and in the United States, specifically in Alaska and in Minnesota.
 - Peer-reviewed research has shown that dental therapists provide excellent care, and in fact, better quality care than dentists in many cases because the therapists' training and experience has focused on a narrower range of procedures on which they have developed proficiency.



- This provider category is analogous to nurse practitioners, a provider type now widely used and respected.
3. *"Inadequately trained dental therapists"* The dental therapists will be well trained by programs certified by COTA, the Commission on Dental Accreditation, the same body that accredits dental training programs. As Commissioner, I would not support a category of inadequately trained providers.
 4. *"Perform complex irreversible surgical procedures"* The scope of services to be performed by dental therapists will be defined in regulation and further identified by the supervising dentist. Dentists will continue to perform the more complex procedures as they are trained to do.
 5. *"Help us protect patients"* Vermont, as other states, has a shortage of dental providers. The best way to protect patients is to increase the dental care capacity in Vermont so that access to preventive and other dental care is available to all, especially those on Medicaid and with low incomes who now have difficulty finding dentists.
 6. *"Without saving patients or the state any money"* S.20 is not intended to save money; it is intended to expand dental care capacity so that all Vermonters have access to quality dental care. Adding providers will increase the number of preventive and other procedures performed. This will improve the oral health status of the population. As a result, some of the cost of additional procedures will be offset in by earlier and less-costly preventive dental care. Everyone would agree that more dental capacity is needed.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information or have questions about my response to the information distributed by the Dental Society.

