

## Follow-Up Email on S.20

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

This e-mail is to respond to several issues and inaccuracies that were raised last evening during the testimony for Bill S.20. It was very challenging to hear primarily negative testimony regarding this new provider in light of all the positive testimony that was presented in both the Health and Welfare and Government Operations Committees. I have been teaching Dental Hygiene in Vermont for over 30 years and have a good idea of the dental landscape. The Green Mountain Care Board's Dental Landscape study clearly indicated that this provider would help to improve dental access in the state. In addition, there is evidence that shows that dental therapists can safely and effectively provide the services within their scope of practice. These types of providers are now practicing in Alaska, Minnesota, in more than 50 countries throughout the world and will soon be practicing in our neighboring state of Maine as the bill passed there last year.

I did some research last evening and contrary to the Commissioner Donegan's testimony that it is costing dental therapists in Minnesota \$1000 for liability insurance, the cost is actually \$92.50. Here is a website with that information. <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/mn/dental-therapy/professional-liability.html> It was also interesting to hear the testimony from Patrick Foltyn stating that the Cincinnati insurance company would not insure these providers. This may be true; however, there are many insurance carriers that are and will be happy to insure dental therapists. As a matter of fact we have spoken to a highly reputable Burlington insurance executive who was extremely surprised that the Cincinnati Insurance company representative would make a blanket statement that they would not insure these providers and their insurance company is investigating the opportunity. This company currently provides dental liability insurance. I should also inform the committee that we recommend that all of our dental hygiene students carry their own liability insurance. The current cost of my personal liability insurance is \$77 per year.

Senator Ashe stated his concern that Vermont Tech would be seeking additional funds from the legislature to support the educational program for this new provider. There is no plan to request additional funding specifically for this program and plan to fund the program with student tuition and fees. In addition, it is true that Vermont Tech is having financial difficulty; however, this difficulty is in no way related to the Department of Dental Hygiene. We are fully enrolled each year and anticipate that this program will also be fully enrolled.

There was a question regarding the levels of dental providers. Dentists have four years of undergraduate college followed by four years of dental school. Dental hygienists have two to four years of education and earn either an associate in science or bachelor of science degree. In Vermont dental assistants do not require any post-secondary education and can be on the job trained.

I was surprised by Dr. Seleen's testimony that he would not utilize these providers. Currently he utilizes Expanded Functions Dental Assistants to place restorations (dental fillings). These assistants have only 5-6 weeks of education not at the college level. The course is offered at the Essex Technical Center and all that is needed to enroll in the program is a high school diploma. Personally, I would seek care from a licensed dental therapist before I would ever have a filling placed by an EFDA (unless that EFDA was a dental hygienist prior to enrolling in the EFDA program).

Senator Mullins stated that the proposed education is half of the education that is being offered for Advanced Dental Therapists (ADT) in Minnesota. There are really only two differences between the

proposed Vermont Tech education and the Minnesota ADT education. The Master's level education in Minnesota requires an associate degree in dental hygiene followed by a baccalaureate degree in any field. The degree could be in psychology, health sciences art or anything. The program at Vermont Tech will require an associate degree in Dental Hygiene with a bachelor's degree preferred. In addition, the program in Minnesota is 16 months of full-time clinical education and the Vermont Tech program is proposed to be 12 months of full-time clinical education. The only other difference in the program is that after the clinical education in Minnesota the ADTs work 2000 hours under the direct supervision of a dentist prior to being eligible to practice under general supervision in schools and nursing homes; whereas, in Vermont they will work for 1000 hours under the direct supervision of a dentist prior to being eligible to practice under general supervision. In both states the therapists will have a collaborative agreement with a dentist. The dentist will determine what services the dental therapist can provide and where. Senator Mullins brought up the scenario where what would happen if a dental therapist was practicing under general supervision and encountered a situation beyond their scope while drilling a tooth. They would place a temporary restoration in the tooth and refer the patient to the dentist with whom they have a collaborative agreement or refer them to a specialist, such as an endodontist or oral surgeon. Referral is the current practice for dentists who encounter these types of situations, as well.

We are all very fortunate to be able to afford dental care and although as Senator Mullins stated he would not send his children to be treated by a dental therapist, there are other individuals who would. A study was performed two years ago that indicated that many Vermonters would be happy to seek care from these providers versus the alternative of not being able to have care at all. One dentist with whom I spoke said that even if Medicaid fees were increased, she still only has two hands. By licensing these providers there would be more hands to treat these patients and as Dr. Rowe testified it would be a financially viable solution for his practice and many others.

As I stated last year in your committee the only thing that I would gain by the passage of this Bill is a significant increase in my workload. The reason that I am so passionate about the bill is that there are just too many Vermonters who currently cannot find a dentist who accepts adult Medicaid and I firmly believe that this bill is one solution to this problem. I implore you vote in favor of this bill so that more Vermonters can access dental care. I would be happy to answer any of your questions regarding the bill at any time.

Sincerely,  
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