

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
FROM: Patricia Moulton, President *Pat M*
Vermont Technical College
DATE: February 6, 2020
SUBJECT: Follow up from 1/31/2020 testimony re: S.242

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss S.242 with you and the Dental Therapy program at Vermont Tech. I am very appreciative of your support to help us get this valuable program launched.

You asked me to follow up on average salary and the number of graduates anticipated from our program.

Graduates: Our goal is to graduate 12 students per cohort during the first three years. After three years, we expect that number to grow beyond 12, likely up to 16. There are two pathways to graduate: one for existing dental hygienists we call our “advanced standing” program which is four semesters (fall, spring, summer and fall). We will be starting with the advanced standing program. The second pathway is for new dental students which is 3 full years with summer sessions. We will be developing distance learning opportunities with out of state students. For this I am focusing on how many we believe we will have here in Vermont.

Salaries: An entry level dental therapist (DT) should start at \$10 more per hour than an entry level dental hygienist. Salary can depend on if they are working in private practice, an FQHC or Medicaid office. We believe \$10/hr. is conservative because our Medicaid reimbursement rates in Vermont are at least 30-40% higher than in Minnesota where we get most of our data from given the time they have had DT’s in practice. In addition our dentist salaries are higher in Vermont than in MN. Some DT’s in MN are making well over \$100k. Anecdotally, one very experienced DT who was previously a well-paid hygienist said her salary increase was modest but her quality of life and job satisfaction went up exponentially. Our hygiene graduates right now are starting at \$30-\$40/hr., or \$62,400-\$83,200 assuming a 40 hours work week. A dental therapist could be paid a percentage of production or a flat hourly rate. Our expectation is DT’s will start at around \$40-\$50/hr. and once they are up to speed make \$65+ depending on the practice. For an FQHC, this translates to a provider that costs them close to 50% less than a dentist.

Impact: I would note our current dental clinic at our Williston Campus serves patients literally from all over Vermont, specializing in elder and Medicaid patients. Our first two DT clinical sites are in Richford and Brattleboro. The Richford practice serves patients from all over northern Vermont. The Brattleboro practice serves patients from all over Windham County. Therefore, the community impacts of these DT practitioners will be significant.

Please let me know how else I can be helpful.