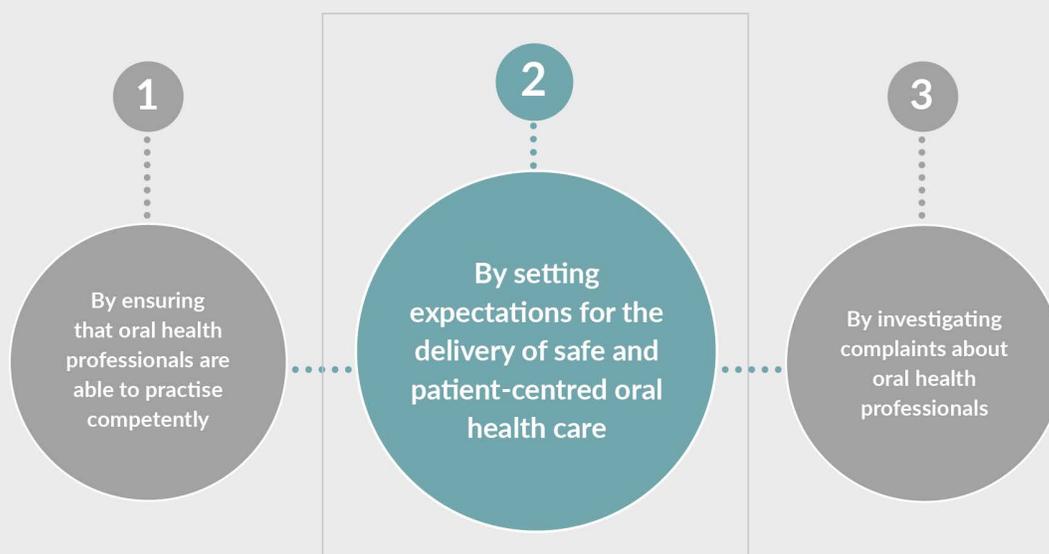


Expectations for clinical and ethical practice

Interpretation Guidelines: Consultations and Referrals by Dental Hygienists

Applies to Dental Hygienists

There are three main ways that the BC College of Oral Health Professionals protects the public:



The British Columbia College of Oral Health Professionals (BCCOHP) was created on September 1, 2022 through the amalgamation of four health regulatory colleges: the College of Dental Hygienists of BC, the College of Dental Surgeons of BC, the College of Dental Technicians of BC, and the College of Denturists of BC. All current requirements for standards of clinical and ethical practice issued by the four colleges remain in place upon amalgamation. This document was created by the College of Dental Hygienists of British Columbia and will be updated to reflect the amalgamation.

Consultations and Referrals by Dental Hygienists

May 5, 2020 Update: The CDHBC Interpretation Guidelines are under review. The content of these guidelines remains in place at this time; however, they need to be applied in the context of the new Dental Hygienists Regulation and CDHBC Bylaws. Readers are welcome to contact the CDHBC office if they have questions about the application of these guidelines in the interim time.

PURPOSE

To clarify the dental hygienist's role in initiating consultations or client referrals to dentists, dental specialists, and other health professionals.

BACKGROUND

The CDHBC Practice Standards indicate the registrant's responsibility for professional collaboration, when appropriate, throughout the process of dental hygiene care. Practice Standard 5.2 discusses referrals in relation to the planning phase of care: "when indicated, dental hygienists must consult with the client's dentist, and may consult with other applicable health care providers, in order to integrate the plan for dental hygiene services into the client's total health care plan." Practice Standard 7.2 incorporates referrals based on the evaluation phase of dental hygiene care: "dental hygienists must, if indicated, recommend referral to dental and other applicable health professional(s)."

There are many situations in which a dental hygienist needs to collaborate with other health professionals and initiate consultations and referrals for client care. These may include concerns about a client's systemic health, for example:

- consulting with a client's cardiologist regarding antibiotic prophylaxis,
- referring to a dietitian for nutritional counseling,
- referring to a physician regarding high blood pressure or management of diabetes
- referring Indigenous clients to Indigenous health service providers.

Other reasons for referral may relate to other medical-dental concerns (e.g., extra-oral or intra-oral pathologies, suspected caries, or progression of periodontal disease).

POLICY

In British Columbia, it is the responsibility of a dental hygienist to develop and implement a process for consultation and/or referral with other health professionals in order to ensure the provision of safe and ethical dental hygiene care to the public. Best practice is for any consultations or referrals initiated by dental hygienists to be conveyed to the client and/or the other health professional in writing. Additionally, client informed consent needs to be obtained and any consultations or referrals initiated need to be documented in the client's chart, as part of the legal record of care.

In order to act in the client's best interest, the dental hygienist should establish a collaborative approach with the client's dentist to mutually assess the need for further care from an appropriate dental specialist or other health care professional(s). Dental hygienists are encouraged to consider continuing competency courses on the identification of oral pathologies, so that they can communicate in a knowledgeable and collegial manner.

REFERENCES

- Bowen D, Pieren, J. Darby and Walsh. Dental Hygiene Theory and Practice. 5th ed. Maryland Heights: Elsevier; 2020.
- Practice Standards and Practice Standard Policies. Victoria: College of Dental Hygienists of British Columbia; 2021.
- Scope of Practice Statement. Victoria: College of Dental Hygienists of British Columbia; 2021.

Added to Interpretation Guidelines: June 2005

Updated: October 2021