

## Program Competencies

### **INTRODUCTION**

Competencies for Dental Hygiene Graduates identifies and organizes the knowledge, skills and attitudes our graduates must attain for entry into dental hygiene practice in public and private settings.

The value of these competencies is related to two areas. First, the competencies **define the core content of the curriculum**. By stating publicly what graduates must know and be able to do after completing our program, we establish a basis for the content of all courses. The competencies set standards for identifying relevant content and provide guidance in making decisions related to our educational program. The degree to which our curriculum is relevant, complete, educationally sound, and well organized is a direct reflection of this document.

A second area of which competencies are useful is **outcomes assessment**. The quality of any curriculum must be judged by its results. By setting forth competencies that a student must demonstrate to qualify for graduation and entry into the profession, this document provides a basis for establishing measures to evaluate the degree to which a student has acquired and can demonstrate the competencies needed to care for individuals and promote the health of the public.

Competencies for Dental Hygiene Graduates should be viewed as dynamic standards that are responsive to a clear need for change. The competencies are intended to serve as a framework for the dental hygiene curriculum and require regular review and revision for continual improvement.

#### **Competency as an Educational Concept**

This document has been organized around the concept of “competencies”. The term *competent* is defined as the level of special skill, knowledge and attitudes derived from training and experience. Competencies for dental hygiene graduates can be more specifically described by several basic characteristics. Competencies are a typical part of the practice of dental hygiene; a combination of knowledge, attitude, psychomotor skills, and/or communication skill; and performed at or above an acceptable level of defined standards.

### **ORGANIZATION**

#### **Domains**

The general organization of this document (and ultimately the curriculum) is structured from the general to the more specific. Three “Domains” have been identified: **Professionalism, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and Patient Care**. These domains represent broad categories of professional activity and concern, which occur in dental hygiene practice. By design, these categories are not related to specific courses within the Dental Hygiene Program because course structure does not reflect the scope of a practicing dental hygienist. The concept of Domains is intended to encourage a structure and process in the curriculum that is interdisciplinary, coordinated and applicable to practice.

## **Major Competencies**

Within each Domain, “*Major Competencies*” are identified. A Major Competency is the ability to perform or provide a particular, but complex, task or service. For example, “the dental hygienist must be able to systematically collect and accurately record baseline data on the general, oral and psychosocial health status of patients using methods consistent with medico legal principles.” The complexity of this service suggests that multiple and more specific abilities are required to enable the performance of any Major Competency.

## **Supporting Competencies**

The more specific abilities could be considered subdivisions of the “Major Competencies” and are termed “*Supporting Competencies*”. An example of a Supporting Competency is: “Obtain, review and update a complete medical, family, psychological, and dental history”. The acquisition and demonstration of a Major Competency requires a level of mastery of all Supporting Competencies related to that particular service or task. Similarly, Supporting Competencies also require acquisition of more specific abilities, termed “*Foundational Abilities*”.

## **Foundational Abilities**

Foundational abilities are obtained through didactic and laboratory instruction that provide the information and experience needed for satisfactory mastery of Supporting Competencies. Foundational ability encompasses knowledge, skill and attitudes. *Foundational knowledge* is the ability to use information and correctly answer specific questions when asked, for example on an examination. *Foundational skill* is the ability to follow specific rules to produce acceptable results in standardized situations, for example, charting periodontal readings and bleeding points. *Foundational attitudes* are positive intellectual and behavioral actions, such as addressing a patient’s chief complaint prior to proceeding with the planned treatment.

The basic medical and dental sciences, behavioral sciences, and clinical services all provide instruction at the foundation level. Didactic, small group, seminar, laboratory and clinical instruction provide information and psychomotor experiences that enable students to acquire and demonstrate competence in clinical or other dental hygiene employment settings. The inclusion of any specific foundational ability in the curriculum should be based on its direct support of one or more of the “Supporting” and “Major Competencies”. In general, course objectives are designed to provide Foundational Abilities. Therefore, Foundational Abilities are not listed in this document.

## **Summary**

The worth and practicality of **Competencies for Dental Hygiene Graduates** depends on its acceptance and application by the faculty responsible for the educational programs of the Bristol Community College Dental Hygiene Program. These competencies define a level of practice for the **new graduate**, rather than predict the higher level of practice that will be attained by dental hygiene practitioners over their career lifetime. This document is designed to direct and be responsive to the educational needs of our students. Ultimately, the true measure of the value of competencies will be the quality of our graduates and the health care they render to the public.

## **I. PROFESSIONALISM**

The competent dental hygienist provides clinical care using contemporary professional knowledge, judgment and skills. The dental hygiene practitioner must be capable of discerning and managing ethical issues and problems in the practice of dental hygiene, which occur in a rapidly changing environment where therapy and ethical issues are influenced by advances in science and technology, regulatory action, economics, social policy, cultural diversity and health care delivery systems. Additionally, as dental hygiene tries to create a unique identity for the profession and increase its knowledge base, the dental hygienist must be able to understand and apply diverse information to practice in this dynamic environment.

**1. Ethics. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to discern and manage the ethical issues of dental hygiene practice in a rapidly changing environment.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 1.1 Articulate ethical principles relevant to dental hygiene and practice with personal and professional integrity.
- 1.2 Serve all individuals and the community without discrimination.
- 1.3 Respect the cultural differences of the population.
- 1.4 Provide humane and compassionate care to all patients.
- 1.5 Maintain honesty in relationships with patients, colleagues and other professionals
- 1.6 Ensure the privacy of the patient during dental hygiene treatment and counseling and maintain confidentiality of patient records.
- 1.7 Comply with state and federal laws governing the practice of dental hygiene.

**2. Information Processing. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to acquire and synthesize information in a critical, scientific, and effective manner.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 2.1 Accept responsibility for solving problems and making decisions based on accepted scientific principles.
- 2.2 Critically analyze published reports of oral health research and apply this information to the practice of dental hygiene.
- 2.3 Evaluate the safety and efficacy of oral health products and treatments.
- 2.4 Communicate professional knowledge verbally and in writing.
- 2.5 Employ the principles of scientific writing.
- 2.6 Utilize sound judgment in processing information, professional decision-making and application of new information to patient care.

**3. Professional Identity. The new dental hygiene graduate must contribute to improving the knowledge, skills, and values of the profession.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 3.1 Participate in the profession through affiliation with professional organizations and service activities.
- 3.2 Participate in the roles of the profession including clinician, educator, researcher, change agent, consumer advocate, and administrator.

- 3.3 Promote the value of the profession to the public and other organizations outside of the dental profession.
- 3.4 Assume responsibility for lifelong learning and providing contemporary clinical care.
- 3.5 Function as a member of dental and other health care teams.

## **II. HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

The dental hygienist serves the community in both private and public health settings. Public health, which is concerned with promoting health and preventing disease through organized community efforts, is an important component of any interdisciplinary approach. In the practice setting, the dental hygienist plays an active role in the promotion of optimal oral health and its relationship to general health. The dental hygienist, therefore, must be competent in the performance and delivery of oral health promotion and disease prevention services in private practice, public health and other alternative settings.

### **4. The Individual. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to provide planned educational services using appropriate interpersonal communication skills and educational strategies to promote optimal health.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 4.1 Promote preventive health behaviors by personally striving to maintain optimal oral and general health.
- 4.2 Incorporate a wellness philosophy that promotes healthy lifestyles for staff and patients into the practice of dental hygiene and/or the workplace.
- 4.3 Identify the oral health needs of individuals and assist them in the development of appropriate and individualized self-care regimens.
- 4.4 Encourage patients to assume responsibility for their health and promote adherence to self-care regimens.

### **5. The Community. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to initiate and assume responsibility for health promotion and disease prevention activities for diverse populations.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 5.1 Identify services that promote oral health and prevent oral disease and related conditions.
- 5.2 Participate in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation phases of community-based oral health programs.
- 5.3 Participate in the public policy process in order to influence consumer groups, businesses and government agencies to support health care issues.
- 5.4 Use screening, referral and education to bring consumers into the health care delivery system.
- 5.5 Provide dental hygiene services in a variety of settings including hospitals, clinics, offices, hospices, extended care facilities, HMO's, community programs and schools.

## **III. PROCESS OF CARE**

The dental hygienist is a licensed preventive oral health professional who provides educational and clinical services in the support of optimal oral health. The dental hygiene process of care applies principles from the biomedical, clinical and social sciences to diverse populations of all ages that may include the medically compromised, mentally or physically challenged, and socially or culturally disadvantaged.

**6. Assessment. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to systematically collect, analyze and accurately record baseline data on the general, oral and psychosocial health status of patients using methods consistent with medico legal principles.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 6.1 Obtain, review and update a complete medical, family, psychological, and dental history, including assessment of vital signs.
- 6.2 Recognize the patient record as a legal document and maintain its accuracy, consistency and confidentiality.
- 6.3 Recognize medical conditions that require special precautions or consideration prior to or during dental hygiene treatment.
- 6.4 Identify the patient at risk for a medical emergency, take steps to prevent an emergency and be prepared to help manage an emergency should it occur during an appointment.
- 6.5 Perform an extraoral and intraoral examination and accurately record the findings.
- 6.6 Suggest the need for consult/referral to appropriate health care professionals.
- 6.7 Perform an examination of the teeth and accurately record the results.
- 6.8 Obtain radiographs of diagnostic quality.
- 6.9 Distinguish normal from abnormal radiographic findings and correlate those findings with clinical exam data.
- 6.10 Evaluate the Periodontium, record findings and identify conditions that compromise periodontal health and function.
- 6.11 Identify factors and disorders that affect dietary intake and food selection, and recognize risks and benefits of alternative food patterns.
- 6.12 Provide additional assessment data, including diagnostic tests for caries and periodontal disease.

**7. Planning. The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to discuss the condition of the oral cavity, identify actual and potential problems, etiological and contributing factors, and available treatments.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 7.1 Analyze patient data to formulate a dental hygiene care plan which is based on a statement of problems or potential problems related to oral health and disease that may be addressed by dental hygiene services and that is congruent with treatment plans by the dentist and other health professionals.
- 7.2 Establish oral health goals with the patient/family and/or guardian as an active participant.
- 7.3 Establish a planned sequence of educational and clinical dental hygiene services using a problem-based approach.

- 7.4 Communicate the plan for dental hygiene services to the dentist or other interdisciplinary health team members to determine its congruence with the overall plan for systemic and/or oral health care.
- 7.5 Obtain informed consent from the patient prior to implementing services.

**Implementation The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to provide treatment that includes preventive and therapeutic services designed to achieve and maintain oral health and assist the patient in achieving oral health goals.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 8.1 Use current infection control procedures.
- 8.2 Apply basic and advanced principles of dental hygiene instrumentation to remove deposits without trauma to hard or soft tissue.
- 8.3 Obtain radiographs of diagnostic quality.
- 8.4 Control pain and anxiety during treatment through the use of legally accepted clinical techniques and appropriate behavioral management strategies.
- 8.5 Select and administer appropriate chemotherapeutic agents within the scope of dental hygiene practice.
- 8.6 Provide all dental hygiene services that can be performed legally in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- 8.7 Use measures to minimize occupational hazards in the work place.
- 8.8 Involve the patient actively throughout the treatment.

**Evaluation The new dental hygiene graduate must be able to evaluate the effectiveness of planned clinical and educational services and modify as necessary.**

Specifically, the dental hygiene graduate must be able to:

- 9.1 Determine the clinical outcomes of dental hygiene treatment using indices and examination.
- 9.2 Determine the patient's satisfaction with the dental hygiene care received and the oral health status achieved.
- 9.3 Recommend appropriate re-care appointments to patients based the patient's individual needs.