



Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Primary Care all in one oral health practitioner

# DENTAL THERAPISTS

Dental Therapists (DT) can be utilized to improve access to care for individuals in underserved and low-income areas. Dental Therapists have proven to increase oral health awareness and provide high quality clinical dental care.

The role of Dental Therapists has been extensively studied and findings have been published in peer-reviewed literature. The evidence is overwhelming; the following facts are from the referenced documents (the number corresponds to the article).

## BACKGROUND

Dental Therapist(s) (DT) have been utilized throughout the world to respond to the public need for access to care (50). DTs travel to clinics in remote areas to provide dental services (18,30,38,41,48,50,51,67,68,74).

DTs have practiced in Canada for over 40 years. DTs work collaboratively with other healthcare professionals (11, 13, 38).

DT can take and interpret radiographs (x-rays), diagnose decay and perform clinical procedures like restorations (fillings) (12, 14,16,20-24,26,38,47,52,53, 60,61,66).

DTs can remove infected teeth (extractions) and perform scaling of teeth and basic cleanings (4,12,14,16,20-24,26, 38,47,52,53,60,61,66).

DTs promote brushing and fluoride programs in schools, provide dental health presentations (preventive services)(12). DTs are employed in school clinical programs (7,11,19,24,26,29,32,35,41,45,58).

DTs are trained to perform irreversible dental procedures on children and adults (4,9,10,14,16,17,20,22,23,49,52,53).

## MAIN MESSAGE

Dental Therapists promote oral health through education clinics: prenatal presentations, postnatal presentations, classroom presentations and dental education presentation for seniors' care homes (12, 34). Evaluations prove DTs can perform quality work and uphold the standards of care (1,2,5,6,8,10,15,18,31,33,37,40,42,44,49,54,57,63-65,78,81,82). Studies show that clients are open to being treated by DTs (3,27,28,46,56,69,72).

### Dental Therapists...

- Work with dentist and oral health specialists by referring treatment when out of the DT scope of practice (4,17,53,61)
- Refer abnormalities to doctors to detect the presence of oral cancer (16,53,83)
- Lower costs to the healthcare system by treating dental disease (53,59,76,77,79)
- Reduce the level of travel of the local community members (59)
- Reduce use of addictive pain medication by treating the dental disease and managing recurrent decay (39)
- Reduce the prolonged use of antibiotic treatment for dental abscesses by maintenance and monitoring of oral health of the client (39)
- Can be used in private and public service settings (36,55,73,79-81)
- Increase the health of the public by diet counseling and encouraging tobacco reduction strategies (18,71)

## IMPORTANT DT QUOTATIONS

"...the dental therapists are an excellent pool of health human resources who can treat patients with high quality of care at low cost." G. Trueblood, Medical Services Branch, 1994 (79)

"...studies on the cost-effectiveness and competence of dental therapists... have been carried out worldwide and have generally confirmed that dental therapists provide high-quality care in a cost-effective manner." G. Usuak, Journal of Dental Education, 2012 (81)

"Where dental therapists were resident in the community, the oral hygiene ranged from fair to good. Where services were being provided by dentist only and on an intermittent basis, the oral hygiene was consistently poor." K. Davey, Circumpolar Health, 1991 (18)

"The addition of a mid-level provider also raises an opportunity to explore financial models to expand dental coverage to the uninsured and underinsured." I.B. Lamster and A. Formicola, Journal of Public Health Dentistry, 2011 (43)

"...the program covered children from kindergarten to Grade 8 in all elementary schools in the province... The program was carried out by dental therapists...the annual average per capita cost was \$77.40." Putting our money where our mouth is: the future of dental care in Canada. Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 2011 (13)

"Restricting dental therapists' access to the service market on an employer/employee relationship with dentists may be a step in the wrong direction since the employment of dental therapists could increase the dentists' productivity." Pacific Region, Medical Services Branch, Health Canada, 1997 (59)

"...dental therapists now and in the future will make a significant difference in the quality of life to those individuals they do treat. For this reason and because dental therapists have demonstrated their proficiency in providing competent and safe dental care to Alaska Natives, I believe the program deserves not only to continue but to expand." L. Fiset, University of Washington School of Dentistry, 2005 (31)

"Many fewer dentists than exist at present will be needed in industrialized countries in the future. Dental caries which do occur can easily be treated by dental therapists. In future more therapists and fewer dentists, to deal with the more complicated problems, will be required."  
A. Sheiham, International Journal of Epidemiology, 1984 (70)

The Dental Therapist is an asset to the healthcare team in any country and should be considered a valuable investment, providing high quality care at affordable cost. Our educational institutions should respond to the growing needs of our country in the domain of oral health.

"...the oral health profession and its partners in other health disciplines have been reluctant to modify either the educational process or the scope of practice and thus find themselves beyond the crossroads" WHO Expert Committee, WHO Technical Report Series, 1992 (83)

It is time that Dental Therapists join the ranks of healthcare providers, such as Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants and Midwives, to make healthcare more accessible, vital, and dynamic, creating a sustainable healthcare system in Canada (11, 29, 70)

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