Wisconsin’s Governor Walker Signs Legislation Allowing Dental Hygienists to Practice in More Settings with Fewer Restrictions

Madison, Wisconsin - Wednesday, June 21, 2017 – The Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association announced that some supervision restrictions on the practice of dental hygienists have been lifted as a result of new legislation that Governor Scott Walker signed on Wednesday, June 21, 2017. The new law allows dental hygienists to work for hospitals, medical clinics, group homes, correctional facilities, shelters, nursing homes, day care centers for children and adults without the direct supervision or authorization of a dentist. Prior to this legislation, only a dentist could authorize a hygienist to perform services for patients in those settings.

The president of the Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association, Jennifer Martinson, RDH, BSDH of Amery, WI said, “Removing unnecessary barriers to preventive oral care just makes sense. Licensed dental hygienists in Wisconsin look forward to providing their services without restrictive supervision and we thank all those who recognize that value and supported this legislation. Our goal is to improve health and the quality of life especially for people who may have difficulty accessing dental care in other ways.”

The primary objective of this legislation is to improve access to the preventive and therapeutic dental services that hygienists provide. Dental diseases are nearly 100% preventable, and prevention is the primary focus of dental hygiene practice. Dental hygienists must complete standardized professional education and then become licensed to provide professional teeth cleaning, fluoride treatments, dental sealants, non-surgical periodontal treatments, oral cancer screenings and preliminary oral evaluations. These services are all included in their scope of practice and have been for nearly 100 years. Besides the preventive and therapeutic aspects of those services, dental hygienists assist patients to obtain care from other health care providers when needed. Patients who require medical, reparative or surgical dental services will be referred to medical providers and dentists.

The legislation was supported by numerous professional associations including the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA), Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin (CHAW), Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin (CHW), Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association (WI-DHA), Wisconsin Dental Association (WDA), Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA), Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition (WOHC), American Academy of Pediatrics – Wisconsin Chapter (AAP-WI), and WAHLDAB (County Health Officers).
The Coalition to Improve Access to Preventive Oral Health Care stated, “Finding new and innovative ways of integrating dental hygienists into a variety of new settings has the potential to improve the oral health of Wisconsin’s residents and reduce the cost of preventable conditions stemming from poor oral health. The Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association wishes to thank Representatives Kathy Bernier (R–Lake Hallie, District 68) and Evan Goyke (D–Milwaukee, District 18) and Senators Sheila Harsdorf (R–River Falls, District 10) and Tim Carpenter (D–Milwaukee, District 3) for championing this legislation.” The bill received wide-spread bipartisan support from Wisconsin lawmakers with over half of all state legislators in both bodies signing on as co-authors and co-sponsors. The chairs of both the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, Senator Leah Vukmir (R–Brookfield, District 5) and the Assembly Health Committee, Representative Joe Sanfelippo (R–New Berlin, District 15) are listed as co-authors of the bill.

On the day of the bill signing, WI Assembly Representative Adam Jarchow (R–Balsam Lake) who was one of the co-authors of the bill, introduced his constituent Jennifer Martinson as the WI-DHA president, and congratulated dental hygienists Matt Crespin (CHAW) from Milwaukee and Linda Jorgenson (WI-DHA) from River Falls, WI for their successful work on the bill.

The new law is intended to increase the number of settings in which dental hygienists may practice dental hygiene without the authorization and presence of a licensed dentist, including federal, state, county, or municipal correctional or detention facilities; facilities established to provide care for terminally ill patients; charitable institutions open to the public or members of a religious sect or order; non-profit home health care agencies; non-profit dental programs serving primarily indigent, economically disadvantaged, or migrant worker populations; nursing homes, community-based residential facilities, and hospitals; facilities that are primarily operated to provide outpatient medical services; adult family homes; adult care centers; and community rehabilitations programs.

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About the Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association
The Wisconsin Dental Hygienists’ Association (WI-DHA) is the state’s professional organization, chartered by the American Dental Hygienists’ Association (ADHA) and representing the professional interests of dental hygienists in Wisconsin. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. For more information about WI-DHA and ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit WI-DHA at www.widha.org or ADHA at www.adha.org
Pictured here: Pam Fraser, (Children’s Hospital of WI); Chad Zulegar (Rep. Bernier’s staff); Matt Crespin MPH, RDH (Children’s Health Alliance of WI), Matt Rossetto (WDA), Representative Kathy Bernier (R-Lake Hallie), Laura Rose (Wisconsin Hospital Association), Angie Stone, BSDH (WI-Dental Hygienists’ Association), Hanna Huffman (Arena Strategies / Children’s Hospital of WI), Senator Leah Vukmir (R-Brookfield), chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services; Lincoln Burr (Rehabilitation for WI), Jodi Bloch (Children’s Hospital of WI), Kim Drake (Senator Sheila Harsdorf’s staff) and Wisconsin State Governor, Scott Walker. June 21, 2017

Pictured here: Angie Stone, RDH, BSDH (HYLIFE OHA), Linda Jorgenson, RDH, BS, RF (WI-DHA), Matt Crespin, MPH, RDH; (CHAW), Jennifer Martinson, RDH, BSDH (WI-DHA), Adam Jarchow (R-Balsam Lake) Assembly District 28.
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