



THE CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRE

*ENTRY-TO-PRACTICE
COMPETENCIES AND STANDARDS
FOR CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS*

**QUESTIONS &
ANSWERS: PRACTISING
DENTAL HYGIENISTS and
STUDENTS**

Canadian Dental Hygienists
Association

The *ETPCS: Q&A* attempts to anticipate and answer common questions related to the *Entry-To-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists* to aid in implementation. *ETPCS: Q&A* should be used in conjunction with the ***Entry-To-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists***.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists* (ETPCS) is a two-part document. Part A – National Competencies presents outcome statements to express the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all dental hygiene students must demonstrate prior to graduation. Part B – National Standards defines how dental hygienists must practise in accordance with their regulatory body.

The implementation of a national set of competencies and practice standards as set out in the document *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists* will be a significant accomplishment for the profession. It will guide the educational preparation of all dental hygiene students by providing exit outcomes regardless of the province or program. The standards of practice in each province will have a consistent foundation.

ETPCS: Q&A attempts to present common questions and answers to assist stakeholder users in gaining a better understanding of national direction for dental hygiene education and practice.

CDHA's *Pathways to Support the Oral Health of Canadians: The CDHA Dental Hygiene Education Agenda, May 2009* provides a detailed assessment of variables influencing the dental hygiene profession and impacting on the educational needs of dental hygienists, and the relevance of competencies and standards for the profession.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

How were the *National Competencies and Standards* developed?

Development of Part A - *National Competencies* was a collaborative project including input from the major stakeholders; Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC), Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulatory Authorities (FDHRA), National Dental Hygiene Certification Board (NDHCB) and dental hygiene educators (DHEC).

The competencies were developed using the input of Canadian dental hygienists and evidence from the literature on interprofessional education and dental hygiene education. There were three phases to this project. Phase One involved a search of the literature to explore documents and outcome statements being developed in other health professions. This was followed by a workshop involving 21 key dental hygiene informants who created the initial competency statements. A national web based survey was conducted during Phase Two, and regional focus groups in Phase Three collected additional comments that were used to shape the final version of the *National Competencies*.

For a full explanation of the development of the competencies, you may refer to the January 2008 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene*- Sunell et al., National competencies for dental hygiene entry-to-practice. *CJDH*. 2008;42(1):27-36.

Development of Part B – *National Standards*

The mandate for regulatory bodies is different than the mandate for education. Therefore the *National Competencies* (Part A) cannot be directly transferred to national standards of practice. The Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulatory Authorities (FDHRA) has developed a parallel document (Part B) that reframes the *National Competencies* to meet the regulatory perspective. The FDHRA did however use the *National Competencies* (Part A) as a resource to develop a Part B - *National Standards* that articulates the competencies from a regulatory perspective. As such the language and organization of Part B is more closely aligned with standards of practice.

Who will use the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*?

Now that the project is complete, the original stakeholders will become the users of the *National Competencies*. Each organization will interpret the *Competencies* in *ETPCS* in a manner that meets the unique needs of the respective organization without changing the overriding intent of having one national standard.

All key stakeholders within dental hygiene will use the *ETPCS*. Depending on their individual mandate each stakeholder will use it somewhat differently.

Dental Hygiene Educators

The *ETPCS; Part A – National Competencies* is first and foremost an academic document. Educators will use this document along with other documents such as the “CDAC requirements”, “NDHCB Blueprint” and provincial practice standards to design curriculum and develop programs. Educators and administrators will also use this document to lobby provincial Ministries of Education for changes to provincial program standards and funding.

Canadian Dental Hygienists Association

The CDHA is the national voice for the dental hygiene profession. The *ETPCS* will be an important resource for communicating our vision for dental hygiene education to the profession, other professions, governments and the public. The CDHA will also use the document as a resource for designing members’ professional development opportunities.

Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulatory Authorities (FDHRA)

Just as the *National Competencies* (Part A) will provide a common national standard for dental hygiene education, it is believed that the *National Standards* (Part B) will provide a common national standard for dental hygiene regulation and practice. Provincial regulatory bodies will determine how best to incorporate the national standards into their provincial practice standards.

Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC)

CDAC is the body responsible for accrediting dental hygiene education programs across Canada. CDAC, in consultation with its partners (including CDHA and the provincial/territorial regulatory authorities for dental hygiene), develops and approves requirements for dental hygiene educational programs. Accreditation is a nongovernmental, peer review process that measures education programs and hospital dental services against predetermined national requirements. CDAC acts as a partner with the profession, educational institutions and health facilities to protect and further the public interest through the accreditation process. CDAC supports and takes its directives from the FDHRA. When the FDHRA has approved the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*, CDAC intends to revise the accreditation requirements to be consistent with the entry to practice requirements approved by the FDHRA.

National Dental Hygiene Certification Board (NDHCB)

The NDHCB exists so that Canadian regulators have reliable and valid testing mechanisms for assessing current dental hygiene competencies. On behalf of the participating Canadian dental hygiene regulators, the NDHCB is the agency

responsible for the development, administration, scoring and reporting of results of the National Dental Hygiene Certification Examination. NDHCB supports and takes their directives from the FDHRA. When the FDHRA has approved the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*, NDHCB intends to realign its examination process with the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*.

What are the benefits of one national standard for entry-to-practice education?

The benefits of one national educational standard are numerous and cannot be overstated.

- The educational foundation of our profession will be consistent across the country.
- Educators across Canada, regardless whether in publically funded or privately funded institutions, will have the same document to use for curriculum development.
- Regulators will be able to develop practice standards that reflect both national and provincial expectations.
- Regulators will be able to meet requirements imposed by the Agreement on Internal Trade with confidence knowing that there is consistency in entry-to-practice education across all provinces.
- CDAC requirements will reflect the *National Competencies* when they are approved by the FDHRA.
- NDHCB examinations will be revised to ensure all entry-to-practice candidates meet the *Entry-to-Practice Standards and Competencies for Canadian Dental Hygienists*, when they are approved by the FDHRA.
- Clear articulation of competencies that are shared by other health professionals will encourage inclusion of dental hygiene in interprofessional education opportunities.
- Dental hygiene education will be recognized by other professions and post secondary institutions that could lead to other career opportunities and easier access to advanced education.

Who is responsible for implementing the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*?

The implementation of *ETPCS* will require the concerted effort of many groups and individuals. No one sector of dental hygiene can drive this process on its own. Implementation will require clear and consistent direction at the national level that can be provided by CDHA, FDHRA, CDAC and NDHCB. The bulk of the work however will need to be done at the provincial level by dental hygiene educators and regulatory bodies. Each province will have its own unique situations and processes to prioritize

and to follow.

How long will it take to implement the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*?

It is difficult to provide an exact date when the *ETPCS* will be fully implemented. However the following provide some guidelines as to process and possible timelines.

- The *National Competencies* were shared with dental hygiene educators who attended workshops in British Columbia and Ontario in November 2008.
- Provincial regulatory authorities have reviewed and agreed in principle with the *ETPCS*.
- Provincial regulatory authorities will consider changes to their standards of practice in response to the *National Standards*. Any changes to *standards of practice* will need to go through required consultation and approval processes in the province.
- Once CDAC receives direction from FDHRA, the CDAC's Documentation Committee will review and revise as needed the dental hygiene accreditation requirements. The revised requirements will then be sent to communities of interest to gain commitment before final approval. This process will take from 12 to 16 months.
- The NDHCB has begun the process of revising its national dental hygiene entry-to-practice competencies blueprint in order to align it with the new *ETPCS*. An extensive consultation process is scheduled in early 2011 to ensure all stakeholders agree on the level of importance and frequency of use of each identified individual competency. This crucial step is necessary to ensure the NDHCB examination is calibrated adequately. The NDHCB is also awaiting direction from the FDHRA as to when it should start testing new candidates under the *ETPCS*. It is anticipated that the NDHCB examination will reflect the *ETPCS* by May 2013.
- If all activities proceed as anticipated full implementation of the *ETPCS* may be achieved in 2013.

Do provincial dental hygiene organizations have a role in implementation of the *Entry-to-Practice Competencies and Standards for Canadian Dental Hygienists*?

While much of the work with the competencies and standards has been at the national level, implementation must occur at the provincial level. Educators and practising dental hygienists will need the support of their professional associations. Professional associations have expertise in lobbying governments on many issues. They should lend this expertise and support to educators as they lobby for implementation of the new competencies. Professional associations are also well positioned to meet some of

the continuous learning needs of practicing dental hygienists. This is an excellent opportunity for educators, professional associations, and regulatory bodies to collaborate for the common good of the profession and the public.

NATIONAL COMPETENCIES

What is the purpose of the *National Competencies*?

The *National Competencies* (Part A) were developed to articulate one national educational standard for the dental hygiene profession in Canada that could be “used to develop curriculum, assess programs, examine graduates and develop provincial regulatory standards as well as continuing competency programs” (Sunell et al., National competencies for dental hygiene entry-to-practice. CJDH. 2008;42[1]: 27-36).

The *National Competencies* describe the foundation necessary for entry into the dental hygiene profession in Canada. In addition the *National Competencies* reaffirm the profession’s support for the dental hygiene process of care and recognizes the specialized roles of dental hygienists in health promotion, clinical therapy, and education.

The *National Competencies* will be used by all sectors of the dental hygiene profession. Educators, regulators, Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC), and National Dental Hygiene Certification Board (NDHCB) will use this document in the accreditation and examination processes. In addition, *National Competencies* will support efforts to include dental hygiene students in interprofessional education with other health professionals as shared competencies with other health professions are clearly identified. Finally, the *National Competencies* establishes the profession’s belief in one consistent educational foundation for dental hygiene programs across Canada.

Why do we need national competencies for dental hygiene?

There are many reasons to develop national competencies for dental hygiene. Perhaps the most important reason is to ensure that individuals preparing to enter the profession develop the requisite abilities for practice in an increasingly complex health care environment and to ensure the dental hygiene profession remains relevant. By ensuring this, dental hygienists will be better prepared to meet the oral health needs of the Canadian public.

Variations related to dental hygiene education in Canada have created diversity in the educational preparation of dental hygienists and national competencies will provide a national standard for dental hygiene education.

A strong profession needs to have a strong, universal foundation. Therefore it is essential that the education of dental hygienists is grounded by a national document that clearly articulates the competencies agreed on by all sectors of the profession. The *National Competencies* represent the first time that CDAC, CDHA, FDHRA and NDHCB have agreed on a common standard for entry-to-practice education.

What do the *National Competencies* look like?

The *National Competencies* (Part A) identifies 116 competency statements clustered under 8 domains. When considered together, the competency statements articulate the essential abilities for entry-to-practice dental hygiene based on the following definition of the profession:

Dental hygienists are primary oral health care providers guided by the principles of social justice who specialize in services related to clinical therapy, oral health education and health promotion.

Dental hygienists provide culturally sensitive oral health services for diverse clients throughout their life cycle. They work collaboratively with clients, guardians and other professionals to enhance the quality of life of their clients and the public.

Organization of Competencies

The 116 competencies are divided into 8 domains organized within two broad categories:

- 1) Core Abilities — reflecting abilities common to the provision of all dental hygiene services but also common to other health care professionals; and
- 2) Dental Hygiene Services — specific abilities related to specialized services provided by dental hygienists.

Collectively, these competencies articulate the critical abilities required to provide safe and effective therapeutic and preventive care. They also address the increasing need for dental hygienists to be able to work within interprofessional and multidisciplinary settings; use an evidence based approach for decision making; manage a dental hygiene practice, and promote positive oral health and health policies and programs that will increase access to oral health care.

Competency Domains

Core Abilities:

(common across all health professions)

The dental hygienist as a:

- A. Professional
- B. Communicator and Collaborator
- C. Critical Thinker
- D. Advocate
- E. Coordinator

Dental Hygiene Services:

(specialized areas unique to dental hygiene)

The dental hygienist as a:

- A. Clinical therapist
- B. Oral health educator
- C. Health promoter

How do the *National Competencies* compare with the *CDHA Definition & Scope*?

CDHA Areas of Responsibility	New Domains
	<i>Core Abilities</i>
Professional	Professional Communicator and Collaborator
Research	Critical thinker
Change Agent	Advocate
Administration	Coordinator
	<i>Dental Hygiene Services</i>
Clinical therapy	Clinical therapist
Education	Oral health educator
Health Promotion	Health promoter

NATIONAL STANDARDS

What is the purpose of the *National Standards*?

Dental hygiene regulatory authorities have very specific mandates — to ensure the public receives safe, quality dental hygiene care. While the context of dental hygiene practice may be influenced by differing legislation across Canada, the obligation to protect the public by determining entry-to-practice requirements and regulating the profession is consistent. For this reason the FDHRA has participated in the development of the national competencies. Having a common standard for entry-to-practice dental hygiene education in Canada will ultimately support the regulation of the profession in each province. Regulatory bodies will have more confidence when registering dental hygienists from different provinces once all dental hygiene graduates are receiving the same educational foundation. National competencies approved by the FDHRA will be used by CDAC and NDHCB to fulfill their mandate.

What do the *National Standards* look like?

The *National Standards* have two broad categories representing Professionalism, and Dental Hygiene Services and Programs. Within each category are specific standards that reflect the elements for dental hygiene practice. Each standard is supported by examples of performance indicators that are meant to add clarity and guidance for practising dental hygienists.

PROFESSIONALISM

- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Knowledge Application
- Continuing Competence
- Dental Hygienist-Client Relationship
- Practice Environment – Health & Safety
- Practice Management

DENTAL HYGIENE PROCESS* (A FRAMEWORK FOR DENTAL HYGIENE SERVICES and PROGRAMS)

- Dental Hygiene Assessment
- Dental Hygiene Diagnosis
- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation

*the specialized area of clinical therapy, oral health & health promotion are addressed within each aspect of the DH Process

How will the FDHRA use the *National Standards*?

Although dental hygiene is regulated provincially, it is anticipated that each provincial regulatory body will use the *National Standards* to re-examine its standards of practice. In some cases, the provincial standards of practice may already represent the national standards; in other cases regulatory bodies may chose to revise or draft new practice standards consistent with the national approach. Ultimately the more each provincial regulatory body aligns with the national approach, the greater ability they will have to regulate the profession without instituting processes that can be viewed as barriers to care or employment by registrants and governments.

As new practice standards are introduced by provincial regulatory bodies, practising dental hygienists will be expected to achieve these standards through continuous learning strategies. It is anticipated that this will be accomplished through quality assurance programs already in place or under development. Professional associations and educational institutions can support practising dental hygienists by providing opportunities for professional development and continuing education.

What impact will the FDHRA's activities have on dental hygiene education?

Decisions by the FDHRA will not have a direct effect on dental hygiene practice or education. It will be the actions taken by the provincial regulatory bodies that will determine the impact in each province. Any changes to practice standards at the provincial level will need to be adopted by practising dental hygienists and educational institutions.

PRACTISING DENTAL HYGIENISTS and DENTAL HYGIENE STUDENTS

I am already working as a dental hygienist. How will the *ETPCS* affect me?

The competencies will not directly affect practising dental hygienists. The competencies will be used to revise dental hygiene education programs. Dental hygienists currently registered or licensed to practise dental hygiene will not be required to go back to school.

However when the provincial regulatory bodies incorporate the *National Standards* into their *Standards of Practice* then each dental hygienist will be expected to meet these new standards. In most cases this will be addressed through existing quality assurance programs that require dental hygienists continually to update their knowledge and skills.

Why should dental hygienists support these changes?

Dental hygiene practice and health care are not static. The practice of dental hygiene has changed significantly over the past twenty years. While educational programs have adapted to these changes to the best of their abilities, there has not been a coordinated effort across Canada to establish a national standard to reference. Change will continue to impact both dental hygiene practice and education; self regulation, non traditional practice, expanding scope of practice, evidence based decision making and inter professional collaboration are just a few of the current trends. These changes will affect the profession as a whole, now and in the future. We should embrace the possibilities that change can bring.

There is no doubt that some practising dental hygienists will feel anxious about changes to dental hygiene education because they are unsure how their background will compare to the new standard. It is important to realize that practising dental hygienists not only have their educational background but have continued to learn and gain valuable experience since their graduation. Dental hygienists entering the profession straight from school do not have the advantage of years of experience or of the additional learning gained from practising. The new graduates will be expected to meet the same practice standards as experienced dental hygienists. It is essential that the educational system prepares them appropriately. A strong educational foundation promotes a strong profession that ultimately benefits every dental hygienist.

If dental hygiene education programs become degree programs, will this affect my registration or licence?

The discussion of a dental hygiene degree for entry-to-practice has been ongoing for some time. The development of the competencies was based on the abilities that dental hygiene students must demonstrate to graduate and be eligible for registration or licensure in their jurisdiction. The discussion of diploma or degree was set aside during the development of the competencies to ensure the focus remained on the primary question to be answered. "What do new graduates need to know and be able to do to provide appropriate dental hygiene services for the Canadian public?" (Sunell et al., National competencies for dental hygiene entry-to-practice. *CJDH*. 2008;42[1]: 32).

Registration or licensure decisions are the responsibility of the regulators. The regulatory body in each province determines the level of education required for registration or licensure. Changes to dental hygiene programs will not automatically change these requirements. However it is common practice to 'grandmother' professionals already registered/licensed when new requirements are introduced. In this situation, you would remain registered/licensed, and would not need to return to school to complete a degree.

Will dental hygienists graduating from these new programs get paid more?

There is no evidence to suggest that graduates of programs that have incorporated the competencies will receive more pay or other benefits. In fact a study by Imai & Craig (2005) suggests that tangible aspects of employment such as job security, income or benefits are not changed even for dental hygienists who have obtained a degree. (Reference: Imai, P. & Craig, B. Profile of the University of British Columbia's Bachelor of Dental Science in Dental Hygiene graduates from 1994 to 2003. *CJDH*. 2005; Vol 39, No 3:117-129)

I am just starting my dental hygiene program. How will the implementation of the *ETPCS* affect me?

Incorporating the competencies into the curriculum of existing programs will take time. It requires program development and approval from many levels. It is unlikely that changes will be implemented in a program already in progress.

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