

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5754

AS OF FEBRUARY 27, 1991

Brief Description: Allowing dental hygienists to perform certain dental hygiene services.

SPONSORS: Senators Niemi, Moore and A. Smith.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Scott Plack (786-7409)

Hearing Dates: March 6, 1991

BACKGROUND:

The state regulates dental hygiene under the Dental Hygiene Practice Act (Chapter 18.29 RCW). Dental hygienists are licensed to remove stains from the surfaces of teeth, may apply topical preventative prophylactic agents, may polish and smooth restorations, may perform root planing and soft-tissue curettage, and may perform certain dental operations and services delegated to them by a licensed dentist. Current law, however, allows dental hygienists to practice some dental hygiene services without supervision in certain health care facilities. To qualify a dental hygienist must have at least two years of practical clinical experience under the supervision of a dentist, within the preceding five years.

Dental hygienists may not surgically remove oral tissue, prescribe drugs, perform diagnosis for treatment or treatment planning or take teeth impressions for the purpose of fabricating oral appliances or prosthesis.

Current law permits dental hygienists to practice only under the supervision of a licensed dentist in hospitals, schools, county health district clinics, public or charitable institutions and in private dental offices. Some believe that the possible shortage of dental hygienists, and the possible lack of access to dental hygiene services, can best be addressed by removing the supervisory requirement. They argue that the requirement limits the number of dental hygienists to the number of practicing dentists who will be able to supervise them.

SUMMARY:

Legislative intent declares that the current supervisory requirement restricts public access to dental hygiene services, restricts competition and establishes a monopoly within the state.

Licensed dental hygienists who have at least two years of practical clinical experience under the supervision of a dentist, within the preceding five years, may perform some dental hygiene services without the supervision of a dentist.

These services include: removal of surface deposits and stains, application of topical or prophylactic agents, polishing and smoothing restorations, assessment and treatment planning for dental hygiene services, injections of local anaesthetic agents for dental hygiene treatment, and root planing and soft-tissue curettage. Patients needing dental planing and dental treatment must be referred to a licensed dentists.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested February 20, 1991