

Policy Statement 3.4 – Specialist Dentists

Position Summary

A dentist seeking recognition as a specialist in a chosen area must be registered to practice in Australia and must have completed a minimum of two years general practice. The minimum period of postgraduate education, including training and experience for any specialty, should be equivalent to three years full time in a program accredited by the Australian Dental Council or equivalent.

1. Background

- 1.1. The recognition of specialties and specialist dentists by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council serves to identify to the public and to the dental and other health professions, individual practitioners who have advanced knowledge and skills in a specified area of dental practice.
- 1.2. Specialisation serves to stimulate organizational education and research in a particular area of dentistry.

Definitions

- 1.3. BOARD is the Dental Board of Australia.
- 1.4. DENTAL ACCREDITATION AUTHORITY is a body responsible for evaluating and approving courses leading to formal dental qualifications and assessing and examining overseas qualified dental practitioners.
- 1.5. SPECIALISATION is the exclusive practice of a recognised specialty of dentistry by an appropriately qualified dentist.
- 1.6. A SPECIALIST DENTIST or SPECIALIST is one who practises a recognised specialty, possesses a higher qualification relevant to this area of dentistry, and has been so registered.
- 1.7. DENTIST is an appropriately qualified dental practitioner, registered by the Board to practise all areas of dentistry.

Position

Practice of dental specialists

- 1.8. The establishment of a dental specialty must address a clear health need and public demand.
- 1.9. The acquisition of specialist status and the use of the designated title of the specialty should be strictly regulated.
- 1.10. Only specialist dentists, recognised by the Board, may use specialist titles or refer to themselves as specialists.
- 1.11. Possession of a higher qualification and/or limitation of practice to an area of dentistry without registration as a specialist with the Board cannot of itself confer specialist status or an entitlement to use the term specialist.
- 1.12. The public must not be misled about a practitioner's specialist status.
- 1.13. Only dentists should be eligible for training and registration as specialists.
- 1.14. Specialisation should not in any way curtail the right of a dentist to practise any area of dentistry.

This Policy Statement is linked to other Policy Statements: 3.1 Dental Workforce, 3.2 Dentists, 3.6 Higher Education Funding, 3.8 Overseas Qualified Dentists & 5.9 Dental Accreditation Authority

Recognition of Dental Specialties

1.15. To be recognised as a dental specialty by the Board, any proposed specialty should meet the following criteria. It should:

- have a clear need and demand of a substantial portion of the population;
- be important to the health of individual patients;
- be an area of dentistry in which dentists may have need to refer patients for provision of expert services;
- require special knowledge and skills, superior to the dental education and training to qualify for registration as a dentist, in order to perform procedures or treat patients with complex oral health needs of an advanced, difficult or unusual nature;
- be definable in order to prescribe the scope of the specialty;
- be one in which there are formal courses accredited by the Australian Dental Council to qualify practitioners appropriately;
- have an established specialist organisation; and
- be recognised by the Australian Dental Association (ADA).

Requirements for Specialisation

1.16. A person seeking recognition as a specialist in a chosen area should have:

- successfully completed an acceptable course to qualify for registration as a dentist;
- been registered to practise as a dentist in Australia;
- completed a mandatory two-year period as a dentist in general practice; and
- completed a course of post-graduate education accredited by the Dental Accreditation Authority leading to an acceptable higher qualification relevant to the area of specialisation.

Education Requirements

1.17. The minimum period of postgraduate education, including training/experience for any specialty, should be the equivalent of three years full time, but longer clinical training may be deemed to be appropriate for some specialities.

1.18. Only those courses of specialist education, which have been accredited by the Australian Dental Council or courses deemed equivalent by it or the Board are to be recognised as acceptable qualifications for specialisation.

1.19. Completion of a research only program must not be considered as sufficient grounds for registration in any specialty.

Registration

1.20. Specialist status shall be subject to registration conferred through statutory powers vested in the Board.

1.21. Dental registration legislation should prescribe:

- areas of dental specialisation;
- requirements for registration as a specialist dentist; and
- that only recognised specialist dentists may use specialist titles.

Obligations of Specialist Dentists

1.22. In treating a referred patient, a specialist dentist shall:

- keep the referring practitioner informed of progress;
- seek consent of the referring practitioner before making a further referral;
- not, under normal circumstances, perform services which are outside their specialty without the consent of the referring practitioner; and
- after completion of treatment, direct the patient back to the referring practitioner.

1.23. A specialist dentist should guide and educate other dentists and allied dental personnel to higher levels of competence within their scope of practice.

Policy Statement 3.4

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