

Competency standards for oral health therapists

Coming into effect on 1 November 2017

Oral health therapists provide oral health assessment, diagnosis, management, treatment and preventive care for patients in accordance with the detailed scope of practice, and commensurate with their approved education, training and competence.

The purpose of this document is to:

- set out the entry level competency standards which applicants for registration as an oral health therapist must meet in order to be registered;
- provide criteria against which an individual's performance in meeting these standards may be measured.

A competent oral health therapist is one who meets the competency standards; applying knowledge, skills, attitudes, communication and judgement to the delivery of appropriate oral health care, in accordance with the scope of practice within which they are registered.

Competency standard	Measure A competent oral health therapist will:
<p>Understand the legal requirements of practising in an oral health workplace</p> <p>Understand and comply with the ethical responsibilities and legislative requirements relating to the safe and competent practice of oral health therapy in New Zealand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate familiarity with, and comply with relevant legislation and Dental Council standards
<p>Behave professionally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and apply the ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards that govern their behaviour as oral health professionals • Prioritise the health needs and safe care of patients • Treat patients with dignity and respect at all times • Put the interests of patients ahead of personal, financial or other gain • Respect patients' right to complain and enable them to seek redress
<p>Understand current scientific knowledge related to oral health</p> <p>Understand current biological, physical, cultural, social and psychological factors which influence the attainment and maintenance of oral health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an understanding of biological, physical, cultural, social and psychological factors in oral health therapy • Use this knowledge in the development and delivery of oral health care for individuals and communities

<p>Use these factors to inform best practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate this knowledge to patients, parents/carers, and the wider community
<p>Provide culturally competent practice</p> <p>See issues from the perspective of people of other cultures</p> <p>Adhere to the Treaty of Waitangi</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate awareness of New Zealand's cultural diversity and recognise that culture is not confined to ethnicity • Recognise the unique place Māori hold as tangata whenua in New Zealand and the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi • Honour the Treaty of Waitangi principles of partnership, participation and protection in the delivery and promotion of oral healthcare • Practise in a way which respects each patient's identity • Observe cultural etiquette • Consider cultural perspective in decision-making • Assist patients to receive oral health therapy services which take into account their cultural needs • Treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences
<p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Communicate effectively with patients, other health professionals and the public on oral health matters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate honestly, factually and without exaggeration <p><i>With patients</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate good rapport and empathy • Assure patients' dignity • Listen to patients, and respect and consider their preferences and concerns • Explain findings, treatment options and likely outcomes in easily understood language to ensure informed consent • Recognise communication barriers and meet patients' individual communication needs • Adapt information to patients' level of comprehension • Confirm patients' understanding of the information provided <p><i>With other health professionals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate openly in inter-and intra-professional teams for the enhancement of patient care

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide written information and copies of records when making a referral, or providing information, to another health practitioner involved in patient care • Behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues and other health professionals
<p>Promote the oral health of individuals and communities</p> <p>Raise awareness of oral health and its effect on general health and well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate patients at all stages in their life, or patients' family, carers or guardians, about the aetiology and prevention of oral diseases using effective and evidence-based education and communication strategies • Promote awareness and understanding of the relationship between oral health and general health • Provide 'one on one' counsel and advice to encourage sound health attitudes and practices • Communicate importance of issues such as diet, smoking, and oral hygiene on oral and general health • Design and implement oral health promotion projects and evaluate their effectiveness, in response to the oral health needs of specific communities • Demonstrate a commitment to oral health promotion by working with other health personnel and/or educational staff where appropriate • Express a professional view on fluoride, amalgam and other topical public issues related to oral health • Facilitate patients' access to services and resources
<p>Obtain patient information</p> <p>Obtain by interview and examination patient information relevant to the delivery of oral health care; record this information logically, legibly; and store securely</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record an accurate patient history to inform patient care • Perform an extra-oral examination • Detect hard and soft tissue abnormalities, e.g. dental erosion, enamel defects, oral ulceration • Detect dental caries for patients up to age 18 • Detect periodontal disease(s), plaque and calculus • Use posterior bitewing and periapical radiographs, and other appropriate tests, to aid in the detection of dental caries and periodontal disease • Take intra- and extra-oral photographs • Record examination findings, demonstrating that all orofacial tissues have been examined closely

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record information on teeth present/missing or restored • Ensure records are legible, accurate, up-to-date, complete and relevant • Store patient records securely to protect patient confidentiality
<p>Analyse patient information and develop an oral health care plan</p> <p>Assess information to identify oral health problems and formulate an evidence based oral health care plan that addresses the aetiology of dental and oral disease, the attainment or maintenance of oral health, priority of management, patient options, anticipated outcomes and the duration of treatment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess patient information gathered in the interview and assessment • Recognise significant medical, dental and social history and develop the oral health care plan accordingly • Diagnose dental caries for patients up to age 18 • Diagnose periodontal disease(s) • Evaluate individual patient risk for oral disease(s) • Develop evidence based, prioritised oral health care plans which include individualised strategies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managing and preventing oral disease and its consequences • promoting the attainment and maintenance of oral health • Consider and discuss management options, including preventive strategies, and anticipated outcomes • Make recall/review arrangements Arrange for an appropriate recall/review • Seek advice, or refer, to other practitioners when appropriate
<p>Provide or make provision for oral health care</p> <p>Communicate the requirements of an oral health care plan to patients in order to obtain informed consent; where necessary carry out agreed procedures, and manage any complications.</p>	<p><i>Informed consent:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide patients, parents or carers with full explanations and information to make informed decisions • Allow patients the time they need to make an informed decision • Respect the autonomy and freedom of choice of the patient • Record the adopted oral health care plan, including any treatment declined or deferred by the patient • Record informed consent to the agreed oral health care plan • Ensure informed consent remains valid at all times

Preventative Preventive care:

- Place fissure sealants and preventive coatings according to clinical findings and evidence based practice guidelines
- Apply topical fluorides based on the assessment of the caries risk of the patient, according to clinical findings and evidence based practice guidelines
- Apply and dispense non-prescription preventive agents
- Construct and fit mouthguards
- Recontour and polish restorations
- Apply and dispense prescription medicines and preventive agents
- Apply and dispense topical agents for treatment of tooth sensitivity and tooth discolouration

Periodontal management:

- Debride plaque and calculus from supra and subgingival tooth surfaces
- Address predisposing factors
- Give and record self-care instructions
- Place and remove periodontal dressings
- Remove sutures
- Determine a recall regime
- Manage acute periodontal infection by seeking advice and/or patient referral
- Refer appropriately

Restorative intervention:

- Determine the need for restorative intervention
- Consider current clinical practice guidelines and scientific evidence in decision-making
- Select the appropriate restorative procedure and dental materials
- Restore the integrity and function of teeth
- Alleviate tooth discomfort and/or pain by restorative intervention or deciduous tooth extraction, as appropriate

Use of topical and local anaesthetic:

- Identify potential risk factors for local anaesthetic administration and respond appropriately; this may include seeking advice, or patient referral
- Administer topical anaesthetic
- Use the correct local anaesthetic solution and technique
- Achieve adequate anaesthesia
- Understand and manage complications of local anaesthetic

Radiography:

- Use bitewing, periapical and extra-oral radiographs appropriately
- Relate radiographs to patient's needs with relevant structures in view
- Ensure adequate image quality
- Ensure ideal view(s) for diagnosis
- Maintain radiation safety for the patient, staff, public and environment
- Record radiographic findings

Clinical Records:

- Maintain accurate, time-bound and up-to-date patient records
- Store and label extra- and intra-oral photographs, and radiographs, to enable identification
- Store and label study models to enable identification

Orthodontics:

- Trace cephalometric radiographs
- Place separators
- Prepare teeth for bonding of fixed attachments and fixed retainers
- Size and cement metal bands, including loose bands during treatment
- Trial fit removable appliances and fit passive removable retainers
- Remove or replace elastomeric or wire ligatures, and open and close self-ligating brackets

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place and remove archwires Carry out indirect bonding of brackets Remove fixed orthodontic attachments and retainers Bond preformed fixed retainers Remove adhesives Fabricate retainers <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take impressions and make study models
<p>Refer and collaborate with the appropriate health professionals</p> <p>Refer for advice and/or treatment where diagnosis and management planning indicates that the patient requires a level of knowledge and/or skills greater than those of the oral health therapist</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the importance of a team-based approach to patient care Establish a collaborative professional relationship with a dentist(s) /dental specialist(s) Obtain advice from colleagues and other health professionals where necessary Collaborate with colleagues and other health practitioners, and contribute to teamwork for enhanced patient outcomes Make appropriate referrals
<p>Assess the effectiveness of oral health strategies</p> <p>Objectively assess both short term and long term outcomes of oral health strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate an understanding of the prognosis for treatment strategies offered to individuals and to the community at large Communicate this knowledge to patients, parents and the wider community Review and assess outcomes of care
<p>Understand scientific methodology</p> <p>Undertake research and/or analyse relevant scientific literature and apply findings to the delivery of appropriate oral health care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and critically analyse scientific publications in oral health Share experiences and case studies of oral health therapy practice with colleagues Demonstrate understanding of current issues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent developments in oral health Evidential base of practice; of new materials and treatment techniques based on research Use scientific knowledge and practice experience to inform oral health practice
<p>Prevent and control infection</p> <p>Undertake procedures to ensure compliance with Dental Council Infection Prevention and Control practice standard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat all patient body fluids as potentially infectious Practise standard precautions routinely, including appropriate hand hygiene protocols, use of

	<p>personal protective equipment and safe management of sharps and waste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define contaminated and uncontaminated zones and control the extent and spread of contamination in and between these zones • Clean all surfaces and equipment in contaminated zones after each patient treatment • Reprocess all contaminated reusable items appropriately for their intended use • Follow required monitoring and validation protocols for equipment and processes • Maintain infection prevention and control documentation
<p>Maintain a safe work environment</p> <p>Undertake occupational health and safety procedures to ensure compliance with relevant laws and practice standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor emergency plans and accident/incident protocols • Control identified hazards by using/taking the protective measures supplied/identified • Arrange equipment in the surgery to enable practitioners and patients to be able to move safely within this environment • Check materials for expiry dates and rotate as required • Handle, and dispose of, hazardous and contaminated clinical waste safely • Report all actual and potential incidents
<p>Maintain and develop professional practice</p> <p>Reflect upon, self-assess and develop professional practice by continually monitoring the outcomes of oral health care delivery, and undertaking continuing personal professional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show commitment to learning throughout their career • Identify skills, knowledge and attitudes to be developed • Identify learning needs for personal professional development • Implement an active professional development programme • Discuss professional issues with colleagues • Fulfil Dental Council recertification programme requirements