

strongly disagree

One cannot dismiss the oral health crisis we are facing in New Zealand, with many people unable to access affordable dental care. Concurrently, we have an ageing population with increasing medical complexity.

Dentists train for five years to be considered competent in restorative dental care. Even after this five years of training, there is a steep learning curve in the 'real world' of practice, with even experienced practitioners still finding themselves challenged by aspects of providing the best standard of restorative care. I question how a "programme" could ever make someone equally as competent in restorative dentistry as a dentist, unless that programme is the Bachelor of Dental Surgery itself.

Therefore, if there is a discrepancy between competencies of the two professions, are we not going to perpetuate a two-tier dental care system, where finances dictate the quality of care a patient receives? There is obviously a strong need to reduce oral health inequalities in New Zealand, I just don't believe this proposal is the answer.

There are also unanswered questions regarding the physical and financial management of iatrogenic damage and complications. A dental degree equips the practitioner to appropriately manage most complications in a timely manner. So who pays the physical and financial price when the instigator of care is not equipped to compensate a situation they find themselves in? It would likely be the patient.

I do not mean to belittle the capabilities of oral health therapists in their current scope. Oral health therapy is a vital occupation, one who's goal should be setting up the nation's children with good oral health for life, and maintaining it through regular dental hygiene appointments into adulthood. Until this goal is met, the focus should be on practicing efficiently within the current scope.

I believe that this is a critical decision, one that will change the face of dental practice in New Zealand. In my opinion this change will not be for the better, however I do believe everyone's voices need to be heard on this matter, whether they agree or disagree with the proposal. I therefore question the rationale behind making these submissions public, as many people will find this a deterrent in voicing their opinions.

Kind regards,

Danielle