Letter to the Editor

Access to quality dental care for all populations continues to be a top priority for those of us serving in the dental profession. But the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) disagrees with the Globe (9/28) that the creation of an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP) to address this critical issue would benefit those seeking that care.

In 2009, the MDS supported the creation of public health dental hygienists. These providers go into community health centers, nursing homes, and schools to provide hygiene care with a referral back to a dental home. The Department of Public Health has yet to provide a detailed report as to the impact these hygienists have actually had on increasing access to care.

The ADHP proposal would only deliver very limited restorative services without a continuum of care. We believe a more effective model is the Community Dental Health Worker (CDHW), who conducts community-based outreach to link residents to a permanent dental home. This dental team member can help address transportation issues, explain benefits, manage dental fears, and provide appropriate language assistance, with limited training needed.

Massachusetts is a national leader in utilization. There is always room for improvement. Providing quality dental care to residents requires long-term solutions based on evidence. This legislative proposal has not addressed specific barriers that would ensure that patients receive treatment for ALL their dental needs.

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