

Practice of a Dental Hygienist under Remote Supervision

References from § 54.1-2722.E and F. and § 54.1-3408 of the Code of Virginia

- **What is meant by “remote supervision”?**
There are two definitions of "Remote Supervision" in §54.1-2722 of the Code of Virginia (see text below).
 - The definition in **subsection E** addresses practice under remote supervision in the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and in the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). In these two state agencies “remote supervision” means a public health dentist has regular, periodic communications with a public health dental hygienist regarding patient treatment...
 - The definition in **subsection F** means that a supervising dentist is accessible and available for communication and consultation with a dental hygienist during the delivery of dental hygiene services...
- **Where can remote supervision be practiced?**
 - **Subsection E** permits a dental hygienist employed by VDH to practice under the remote supervision of a public health dentist in providing hygiene treatment in VDH public health facilities.
 - **Subsection E** also permits a dental hygienist employed by DBHDS to practice under the remote supervision of a DBHDS dentist in providing hygiene treatment in DBHDS’s mobile/remote supervision program.
 - **Subsection F** permits a qualified dental hygienist to practice under the remote supervision of a qualified dentist at a federally qualified health center; charitable safety net facility; free clinic; long-term care facility; elementary or secondary school; Head Start program; mobile dentistry program for adults with developmental disabilities operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services' Office of Integrated Health; or women, infants, and children (WIC) program.
- **Who can supervise a dental hygienist’s practice of dental hygiene under remote supervision?**
 - **Subsection E** requires that the supervising dentist be an employee of VDH or an employee of DBHDS.
 - **Subsection F** requires that the supervising dentist have an active license issued by the Virginia Board of Dentistry and have a dental practice physically located in the Commonwealth. In addition to a physically-located dental practice, the Board has determined that such a dentist, who practices in Virginia as either an employee or a volunteer in a federally qualified health center, charitable safety net facility, free clinic, long-term care facility, elementary or secondary school, Head Start program, or women, infants, and children (WIC) program, including a mobile dental clinic or portable dental operation that is operated by one of these settings, would qualify as having a dental practice physically located in the Commonwealth.

- **What qualifications are necessary for a dental hygienist to practice under remote supervision?**

The hygienist must have (i) completed a continuing education course designed to develop the competencies needed to provide care under remote supervision offered by an accredited dental education program or from a continuing education provider approved by the Board and (ii) at least two years of clinical experience, consisting of at least 2,500 hours.

- **What is required for a continuing education course in remote supervision?**

The Board requires a remote supervision course to be no less than two hours in duration and to be offered by an accredited dental education program or an approved sponsor listed in the regulation. The required course content is: a) Intent and definitions of remote supervision; b) Review of dental hygiene scope of practice and delegation of services; c) Administration of controlled substances; d) Patient records/documentation/risk management; e) Remote supervision laws for dental hygienists and dentists; f) Written practice protocols; and g) Settings allowed for remote supervision.

- **Are there other requirements for practice under remote supervision?**

A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall have professional liability insurance with policy limits acceptable to the supervising dentist.

- **In what settings can a dental hygienist practice under remote supervision?**

A hygienist can only practice dental hygiene under remote supervision at a federally qualified health center, charitable safety net facility, free clinic, long-term care facility, elementary or secondary school, Head Start program, or women, infants, and children (WIC) program, including a mobile facility or portable dental operation that is operated by one of these settings.

- **What tasks can a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision perform?**

A hygienist practicing under remote supervision may (a) obtain a patient's treatment history and consent, (b) perform an oral assessment, (c) perform scaling and polishing, (d) perform all educational and preventative services, (e) take X-rays as ordered by the supervising dentist or consistent with a standing order, (f) maintain appropriate documentation in the patient's chart, (g) administer Schedule VI topical drugs including topical oral fluorides, topical oral anesthetics and topical and directly applied antimicrobial agents pursuant to subsections J of §54.1-3408 of the Code of Virginia, and (h) perform any other service ordered by the supervising dentist or required by statute or Board regulation.

Under the provisions of § 54.1-3408.V, a dental hygienist is authorized to possess and administer topical fluoride varnish pursuant to an oral or written order or a standing protocol issued by a dentist or a doctor of medicine or osteopathic medicine.

Is the dental hygienist allowed to administer local anesthetic or nitrous oxide?

A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision is not allowed to administer local anesthetic parenterally or to administer nitrous oxide.

What disclosures and permissions are required?

Prior to providing a patient dental hygiene services, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall obtain (1) the patient's or the patient's legal representative's signature on a statement disclosing that the delivery of dental hygiene services under remote supervision is not a substitute for the need for regular dental examinations by a dentist and (2) verbal confirmation from the patient that he does not have a dentist of record whom he is seeing regularly.

- **How is the dental hygienist required to involve the dentist when practicing under remote supervision?**
 - a) After conducting an initial oral assessment of a patient, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may provide further dental hygiene services following a written practice protocol developed and provided by the supervising dentist. Such written practice protocol shall consider, at a minimum, the medical complexity of the patient and the presenting signs and symptoms of oral disease.
 - b) A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall inform the supervising dentist of all findings for a patient. A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may continue to treat a patient for 90 days. After such 90-day period, the supervising dentist, absent emergent circumstances, shall either conduct an examination of the patient or refer the patient to another dentist to conduct an examination. The supervising dentist shall develop a diagnosis and treatment plan for the patient and either the supervising dentist or the dental hygienist shall provide the treatment plan to the patient.
 - c) The supervising dentist shall review a patient's records at least once every 10 months.
- **Can a dental hygienist see a patient beyond 90 days if the patient has not seen a dentist?**

Only if the supervising dentist authorizes such treatment to address an emergent circumstance requiring dental hygiene treatment. The practice protocol developed by the supervising dentist is the initial authorization for a hygienist to provide hygiene treatment under remote supervision for 90 days of treatment. After that 90 day period (absent emergent circumstances), the supervising dentist (or another dentist) must examine the patient, develop a diagnosis and establish the treatment plan for the patient which might address both future dental treatment and dental hygiene treatment and the time spans for such treatment. The dentist decides how often he will see a patient in accord with his professional judgment of the patient's dental needs and the resulting treatment plan. In addition, by statute the dentist must review the patient's records at a minimum of every 10 months. Treatment planning and record review are two distinct requirements.
- **Is a dental hygienist who is practicing under remote supervision allowed to also practice dental hygiene under general supervision whether as an employee or as a volunteer?**

Yes, § 54.1-2722.F specifically states that "nothing in this subsection shall prevent a dental hygienist from practicing dental hygiene under general supervision whether as an employee or as a volunteer."
- **Are the requirements for remote supervision different for a public health dental hygienist employed by the Virginia Department of Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services?**

Yes, remote supervision in a public health setting is defined in § 54.1-2722 E:

E. For the purposes of this subsection, "remote supervision" means that a public health dentist has regular, periodic communications with a public health dental hygienist regarding patient treatment, but such dentist may not have conducted an initial examination of the patients who are to be seen and treated by the dental hygienist and may not be present with the dental hygienist when dental hygiene services are being provided.

Notwithstanding any provision of law, a dental hygienist employed by the Virginia Department of Health or the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services who holds a license issued by the Board of Dentistry may provide educational and preventative dental care in the Commonwealth under the remote supervision of a dentist employed by the Department of Health or the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. A dental hygienist providing such services shall practice pursuant to protocols developed jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services for each agency, in consultation with the Virginia Dental Association and the Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association. Such protocols shall be adopted by the Board as regulations.

The protocols are available in the "Laws & Regulations" tab on the Virginia Board of Dentistry web page.

Law on remote supervision - Code of Virginia:

§ 54.1-2722. License; application; qualifications; practice of dental hygiene; report.

E. For the purposes of this subsection, "remote supervision" means that a public health dentist has regular, periodic communications with a public health dental hygienist regarding patient treatment, but such dentist may not have conducted an initial examination of the patients who are to be seen and treated by the dental hygienist and may not be present with the dental hygienist when dental hygiene services are being provided.

Notwithstanding any provision of law, a dental hygienist employed by the Virginia Department of Health or the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services who holds a license issued by the Board of Dentistry may provide educational and preventative dental care in the Commonwealth under the remote supervision of a dentist employed by the Department of Health or the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. A dental hygienist providing such services shall practice pursuant to protocols developed jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services for each agency, in consultation with the Virginia Dental Association and the Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association. Such protocols shall be adopted by the Board as regulations.

A report of services provided by dental hygienists employed by the Virginia Department of Health pursuant to such protocol, including their impact upon the oral health of the citizens of the Commonwealth, shall be prepared and submitted annually to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources by the Department of Health, and a report of services provided by dental hygienists employed by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services shall be prepared and submitted annually to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize or establish the independent practice of dental hygiene.

F. For the purposes of this subsection, "remote supervision" means that a supervising dentist is accessible and available for communication and consultation with a dental hygienist during the delivery of dental hygiene services, but such dentist may not have conducted an initial examination of the patients who are to be seen and treated by the dental hygienist and may not be present with the dental hygienist when dental hygiene services are being provided.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a dental hygienist may practice dental hygiene under the remote supervision of a dentist who holds an active license by the Board and who has a dental practice physically located in the Commonwealth. No dental hygienist shall practice under remote supervision unless he has (i) completed a continuing education course designed to develop the competencies needed to provide care under remote supervision offered by an accredited dental education program or from a continuing education provider approved by the Board and (ii) at least two years of clinical experience, consisting of at least 2,500 hours of clinical experience. A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall have professional liability insurance with policy limits acceptable to the supervising dentist. A dental hygienist shall only practice under remote supervision at a federally qualified health center; charitable safety net facility; free clinic; long-term care facility; elementary or secondary school; Head Start program; mobile dentistry program for adults with developmental disabilities operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services' Office of Integrated Health; or women, infants, and children (WIC) program.

A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may (a) obtain a patient's treatment history and consent, (b) perform an oral assessment, (c) perform scaling and polishing, (d) perform all educational and preventative services, (e) take X-rays as ordered by the supervising dentist or consistent with a standing order, (f) maintain appropriate documentation in the patient's chart, (g) administer topical oral fluorides, topical oral anesthetics, topical and directly applied antimicrobial agents for treatment of periodontal pocket lesions, and any other Schedule VI topical drug approved by the Board of Dentistry under an oral or written order or a standing protocol issued by a dentist or a doctor of medicine or osteopathic medicine pursuant to subsection V of § 54.1-3408, and (h) perform any other service ordered by the supervising dentist or required by statute or Board regulation. No dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall administer local anesthetic or nitrous oxide.

Prior to providing a patient dental hygiene services, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall obtain (1) the patient's or the patient's legal representative's signature on a statement disclosing that the delivery of dental hygiene services under remote supervision is not a substitute for the need for regular dental examinations by a dentist and (2) verbal confirmation from the patient that he does not have a dentist of record whom he is seeing regularly.

After conducting an initial oral assessment of a patient, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may provide further dental hygiene services following a written practice protocol developed and provided by the supervising dentist. Such written practice protocol shall consider, at a minimum, the medical complexity of the patient and the presenting signs and symptoms of oral disease.

A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall inform the supervising dentist of all findings for a patient. A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may continue to treat a patient for 90 days. After such 90-day period, the supervising dentist, absent emergent circumstances, shall either conduct an examination

of the patient or refer the patient to another dentist to conduct an examination. The supervising dentist shall develop a diagnosis and treatment plan for the patient, and either the supervising dentist or the dental hygienist shall provide the treatment plan to the patient. The supervising dentist shall review a patient's records at least once every 10 months.

Nothing in this subsection shall prevent a dental hygienist from practicing dental hygiene under general supervision whether as an employee or as a volunteer.