Dental Therapist Testamony

From Willam Hitt, D.D.S.

Office Address: Ocean Dental, 3646 E Main St. Columbus, Ohio 43213

Greetings to Chairman Burke and the distinguished members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee.

 It is a great honor for me to address you today. My intent is to refute in practical terms, the most frequently heard objection to dental therapists. I want to assure you that public safety will be greatly enhanced by licensing DTs. I am one of the few dentists that has worked with DTs. I was a remote clinic director for two years in Jamaica, W. Indies. I am absolutely confident that the service of DTs is excellent. At the school dental clinic, no dentist is present. No cell phone service is available or telephones of any kind. Today we can count on telemedicine screens with superhuman magnification. The therapists were often respected as the most trained health professional in the community. Their jobs brought great satisfaction and touched many lives.

Dentist say they are concerned about public safety. Their concern is not supported by research. The online Minnesota studies report no safety issues with therapists. In the same period of the study, the board received five claims against dentists for careless or irresponsible practice, as in the case of the dentist who stood on a skateboard to work.

In 40 years of dentistry, I have performed over 20,000 dental extractions. The main principal is that no operator will pick up an instrument if there is not a high degree of confidence in a good outcome. In an unforeseen problem, patients understand and appreciate when we need to call Dr. Brown, our friendly oral surgeon, to take care of it. A patient has never said, “No, I want you to do something you don’t feel good about.” It doesn’t happen. The risk to safety is not the well trained therapist. The risk is untreated infection and the desperation of patients lining up at the ER.

I would like to say a word about quality of care review. The therapists’ work will be regularly reviewed by the responsible dentist. We do not have quality of care review now. (Federal guides for public health centers do peer review.) It can be years before another dentist sees work that should not have been done. Every profession has members that give less than their best. The cure for dishonesty is more review, more co-operation, and more and better trained providers at every level.

At my age I must say that I have seen this struggle before. My home state of W. Va. Was one of the first to employ physician assistants after 1965 when Duke opened their first class of PAs. The physician resistance was fierce and we understand it was something new. In 2010 CNN Money rated P.A.s as the number two best job in the country. Today Army PAs serve in the White House Med Core for the family of the President. Ohioans need your understanding of this issue, especially those in the 35 counties where there is no Federally Qualified Health Center. Finally the dental profession will someday thank you for your leadership in making S.B. 98 dental therapists the law of the land.