

Submission  
No 238

## INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

**Organisation:** The Dental Hygienists' Association of Australia

**Name:** Ms Miriam Thomas

**Position:** President

NSW Branch Inc

**Telephone:**

**Date Received:** 29/07/2005

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



The Dental Hygienists' Association of Australia  
NSW Branch Inc.  
GPO Box 3289  
Sydney NSW 2001

26/07/2005

Rebecca Main  
Senior Council Officer  
Legislative Council Committees  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Rebecca,

On behalf of the Dental Hygienists' Association of Australia New South Wales Branch Inc, (DHAA NSW Branch Inc.) here are the main points that I raised with you during our telephone conversation and hence our submission.

- Although dental hygienists were employed in the public sector in NSW years ago they were attracted to the private sector by a much greater salary on offer and challenging/interesting employment opportunities.
- There was and still is a shortage of dental hygienists in NSW as there has been no opportunity for people to train in this vocation here in NSW. Training was (until recently) only available interstate or overseas. Interstate training began in South Australia 30 years ago. Overseas trained dental hygienists have to successfully complete a registration exam before being able to list (now register) with the dental board. The University of Sydney, Dental Faculty, and the University of Newcastle, Faculty of Health have both begun the Bachelor of Oral Health courses which will equip students to perform those skills currently performed by dental hygienists. On successful completion of these courses we will see these students in the workforce in early 2008.
- Dental Hygienists in NSW are employed in private practice, either in a general dental practice setting or work for a specialist (periodontist, prosthodontist or orthodontist). Main reason for this is opportunity to work in areas of interest, suitable location, negotiable pay rate (average \$50 per hour permanent) and for an employer who believes in the same philosophy of patient care and delivery of service. It is my understanding that some may feel that dental hygienists pay rate is 'high', but I can only envisage this rate to increase

especially as new graduates will have large University debts (HECS, HELP) to pay on the completion of their studies. Recognition of dental hygienists in the public dental sector here in NSW by way of category and pay scale doesn't even exist.

- If dental hygienists were to currently treat patients in the public dental sector, the theme of prevention which underpins a hygienists' role would be to no avail as there wouldn't be the dental services to complete the ideal patient treatment needs. A simple example would be – on examination of the patient, restorative and periodontal treatment is required. The dental hygienist provides patient education, oral hygiene instruction, scaling and maintenance. Without the restorative work and periodontal treatment (specialist needs) being performed (due to lack of resources-lengthy waiting lists etc) the ideal treatment for the patient would not be provided. Lengthy waiting lists, emergency treatment, lack of resources both physical and human, and lack of funding are all contributing factors.
- Despite all of the above, there is a need to employ dental hygienists into the public sector. Oral health promotion, prevention and working with all community groups requiring a wide range of dental needs would all benefit from the skills able to be performed by dental hygienists.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the meeting in August. One of the major difficulties we have in participating in these sorts of inquiries is that meetings are always held during working hours. It is extremely difficult for dental hygienists to ask for time off to attend these meetings and if successful in getting time off, attending these meetings is unpaid. Our association is small with approximately 80 full members and approximately 70 student members. We are also a non profit organisation. Despite this, we do currently have members involved in the Public Dental Workforce Committee and a member sitting on the NSW Dental Board.

If you require any further information please feel free to contact me on 02 98751902 (home no) or 02 8850 6733 (work no) or via email [mthom44@hotmail.com](mailto:mthom44@hotmail.com)

Regards



Miriam Thomas  
President DHAA NSW Branch Inc.