

Submission
No 227

INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

Organisation: NSW Dental Assistants' Association
Name: Ms Kathy Vern-Barnett
Position: Hon Secretary
Telephone:
Date Received: 6/07/2005

Theme:

Summary



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The Hon. Jan Burnswood MLC
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Legislative Council
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Madam,

RE: Inquiry into Dental Services in NSW

Following discussion at a recent general meeting of this Association I have been authorised by the Executive Committee to make this submission.

We wish to refer only to point (e) of the Terms of Reference – *the dental service workforce including issues relating to the training of dental clinicians and specialists.*

By way of explanation it needs to be stated that this Association has two main activities, firstly professional, conducting courses relevant to the dental assistant workforce, and secondly industrial, as a registered union of employees. In this last role we represent dental assistants who are employed in the private sector. Most of the comments made here are of necessity anecdotal. No reliable statistics are available to us.

- Dental Assistants, sometimes referred to as dental nurses or chairside assistants, are integral members of the dental team and should be recognised as such. Unfortunately this is not always the case, resulting in frequent staff turnovers.
- By and large Dental Assistants are under-paid, under-valued, under-utilised. Over the 30 years of my involvement with the Dental Assistants Association I have seen an ever increasing shortage of suitably qualified Dental Assistants.
- There is no incentive to encourage training and education of young or even more mature age people. This is also reflected in the award rates of pay which we believe to be the 4th lowest in this State.

- Junior rates of pay do not recognise achievement of the Certificate III in Dental Assisting. For this reason there is no incentive for a young person to give up 12 to 18 months to train for an entry level qualification.
- Traineeships do not appear to be the answer because employment of trainees is generally terminated at the end of their traineeship term.
- There is a lack of recognised articulation into further education and higher qualifications.
- Under-utilisation of well trained, suitably qualified staff frequently results in lack of job satisfaction, with an inevitable increase in staff turn over.

This Association believes consideration could and should be given to make dental assisting a more attractive career option.

- ▶ An education program for undergraduates in dental courses as future employers on the value of training and education of dental assistant staff.
- ▶ Establishment of a recognised career path following training and certification. The wider use of hygienists in both the private and public sector would be one of the logical pathways.
- ▶ At the very least there needs to be a Code of Practice for Dental Assistants. The possibility of reviewing relevant regulations or the development of such a Code was already mooted by the Chairman of the Dental Board Dr John Dale at a meeting of the Working Party to review Dental Education in NSW back in 2001.
- ▶ Expanded duties following appropriate training as is already recognised in most overseas countries would assist the retention rate by increasing job satisfaction.
- ▶ It goes without saying that a vastly improved minimum award would attract many more suitable, service oriented people to this occupation.

I apologise for the lateness of this submission on behalf of the executive of the NSW Dental Assistants' Association, comprised as it is entirely of voluntary personnel.

We would respectfully urge the committee to give consideration to the issues raised.

Yours sincerely,



Kathy Vern-Barnett OAM
Hon. Secretary.