

REFORMING DENTAL LICENSURE EXAMS

H.1992: An Act Relative to Dental Licensing Exams

Bill Sponsor: Representative Angelo Puppolo, Jr.

The Massachusetts Dental Society believes that a comprehensive and accurate clinical assessment of dental school graduates who are applying for licensure is essential to providing safe, quality dental care to residents throughout Massachusetts.

However, the current live patient clinical licensing examination is limited in accomplishing this goal, while putting an excessive burden on graduates and patients alike.

The current live patient exam falls short of providing a quality assessment of an applicant's education and training because:

1) It is too focused on a limited set of procedures that do not accurately reflect the multifaceted requirements and responsibilities demanded of dentists in everyday clinical practice.

- Several studies looking at the relationship between performances in dental school compared to results of live patient exams found little or no significant relationship between the two.
- Dentistry is the only medical profession that still requires a live patient component as a condition of licensure.

2) It inadvertently discourages comprehensive care of the patient and can encourage improper care.

- Applicants often must find patients months in advance of their test date, purposely delaying care so that they will have a patient who presents with the qualifying oral health issues.
- Once in the exam, applicants may need to perform procedures that are unnecessary and potentially harmful while ignoring other pressing issues that require treatment, solely to complete the exam requirements.
- Using live patients in a way that their overall oral health is a secondary concern behind evaluating the applicant sets a poor example for would-be dentists and contradicts a licensed dentist's duty to provide quality and timely care to the patient, as described in the American Dental Association's Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct.

3) The process of obtaining a patient to sit for the exam is unduly burdensome on applicants.

- Finding and vetting patients who will qualify to sit for an applicant's live exam is exceptionally time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to accomplish.
- Once an applicant identifies a potential patient who presents with the characteristics that fit the required procedures to be performed, the applicant is completely beholden to them to pass his or her exam. They must pay for the patient's travel and lodging expenses, and still have no guarantee that they will appear on exam day. Knowing the implications for applicants if their patient does not show up, i.e., failure of the exam, extortion by patients is not unheard of.
- Patients who show up but are found unqualified by the examiner cause an automatic failing grade for the applicant. This sets applicants back months and causes them to lose hundreds of dollars in exam fees.

This legislation would eliminate the live patient component of dental licensure exams and direct the Board of Registration in Dentistry to approve an examination that does not require the performance of any procedure upon a live patient.

The Massachusetts Dental Society urges the legislature to pass ***An Act Relative to Dental Licensing Exams***, which directs the Board of Registration in Dentistry to approve an exam format that is a better metric of an applicant's skills by eliminating the problematic live patient component.

Questions can be directed to:

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The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) represents approximately 5,000 dentists in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (about 80 percent of dentists). A statewide constituent of the American Dental Association, the MDS is dedicated to the professional development of its members through initiatives in education, advocacy, the promotion of the highest professional standards, and championing oral health in the Commonwealth.