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New Poll Indicates Widespread Concern with Allowing Unsupervised Mid-Level Practitioners to Perform Irreversible Dental Procedures

More than 70 percent of registered Massachusetts voters said mid-level practitioners should be supervised by a dentist during procedures such as drilling or extracting teeth

Southborough, MA—May 15, 2017— A new survey of 754 registered Massachusetts voters conducted by the MassInc Polling Group revealed that 73 percent of respondents do not feel comfortable allowing mid-level dental practitioners to perform irreversible procedures such as drilling and extraction of teeth without direct supervision from a dentist.

The poll comes as the Massachusetts legislature considers two proposals for licensing a new class of mid-level dental practitioners in the state. The bills differ significantly in terms of training, credentialing and supervision for practitioners.

“The results confirm what dentists in Massachusetts have heard directly from patients—future mid-level dental professionals must be directly supervised when performing irreversible procedures,” said Dr. David Lustbader, DMD, president-elect of the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS). “There is a substantial volume of Massachusetts residents with complex oral health care needs. To effectively treat these patients, it is essential that mid-level dental practitioners have the highest possible level of education, training and supervision.”

The poll also found that 72 percent of respondents support credentialing standards for mid-level dental professionals that mirror licensure requirements set forth for Physicians Assistants (PAs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs).

In January, the MDS filed legislation on Beacon Hill that provides a comprehensive approach to oral health care issues facing the Commonwealth. The bill focuses on care for underserved populations and resources to address socio-economic barriers that impact dental care for lower income Massachusetts residents.

The MDS legislation advocates for the establishment of a new mid-level dental professional called “Public Health Dental Practitioners.” In keeping with licensure standards for PAs and NPs, the bill also would require these new professionals to obtain a bachelor’s degree and two years of training after graduation, and to be directly supervised when performing irreversible procedures.

A different bill filed separately from the MDS legislation would allow mid-level professionals to be licensed with only a two-year associate’s degree and one year of training after graduation.

That bill also would allow mid-level professionals to perform irreversible procedures with phone supervision by a dentist located as far as 200 miles away.

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