



Competencies for the Associates Degree Dental Hygiene Program

Introduction

The dental hygiene graduate must be able to perform at or above acceptable defined standards to safely provide dental hygiene care at an entry level. A set of competencies has been developed to identify and organize the knowledge and skills the graduate must acquire to become a critically thinking, competent, and caring practitioner in the delivery of dental hygiene services in clinical and alternative environments.

The competencies determine the core content of the curriculum, and establish a framework for the content and sequencing of all courses. This document communicates to the student, faculty and general public the measurable entry-level competencies that are deemed essential for the dental hygiene student to acquire in order to qualify for graduation and to effectively care for patients.

Organization

Domains

The organization of this document progresses from four broad categories that make up the central domains of the curriculum, to more specific foundational abilities and skills in specific course requirements. The domains represent themes of all categories of dental hygiene activity encompassed in many courses and learning experiences rather than specific courses. The concept of domains is intended to encourage the development of a structure and process in the curriculum that transcends all disciplines. The four domains in this document include:

- I. Professionalism and Ethics
- II. Dental Hygiene Process of Care
- III. Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
- IV. Professional Commitment and Advancement

Major Competencies

Within each domain there are major competencies relevant to the domain that must be performed. Major competencies require the ability to perform a particular complex professional service or task. An example of this would be, “the dental hygienist must be able to systematically, collect, analyze and record data on the general, oral and psycho-social health status of clients using methods consistent with medico-ethical legal principles.” The complexity of this dental hygiene service indicates that more specific foundational skills are required to complete a major competency.

Supporting Competencies

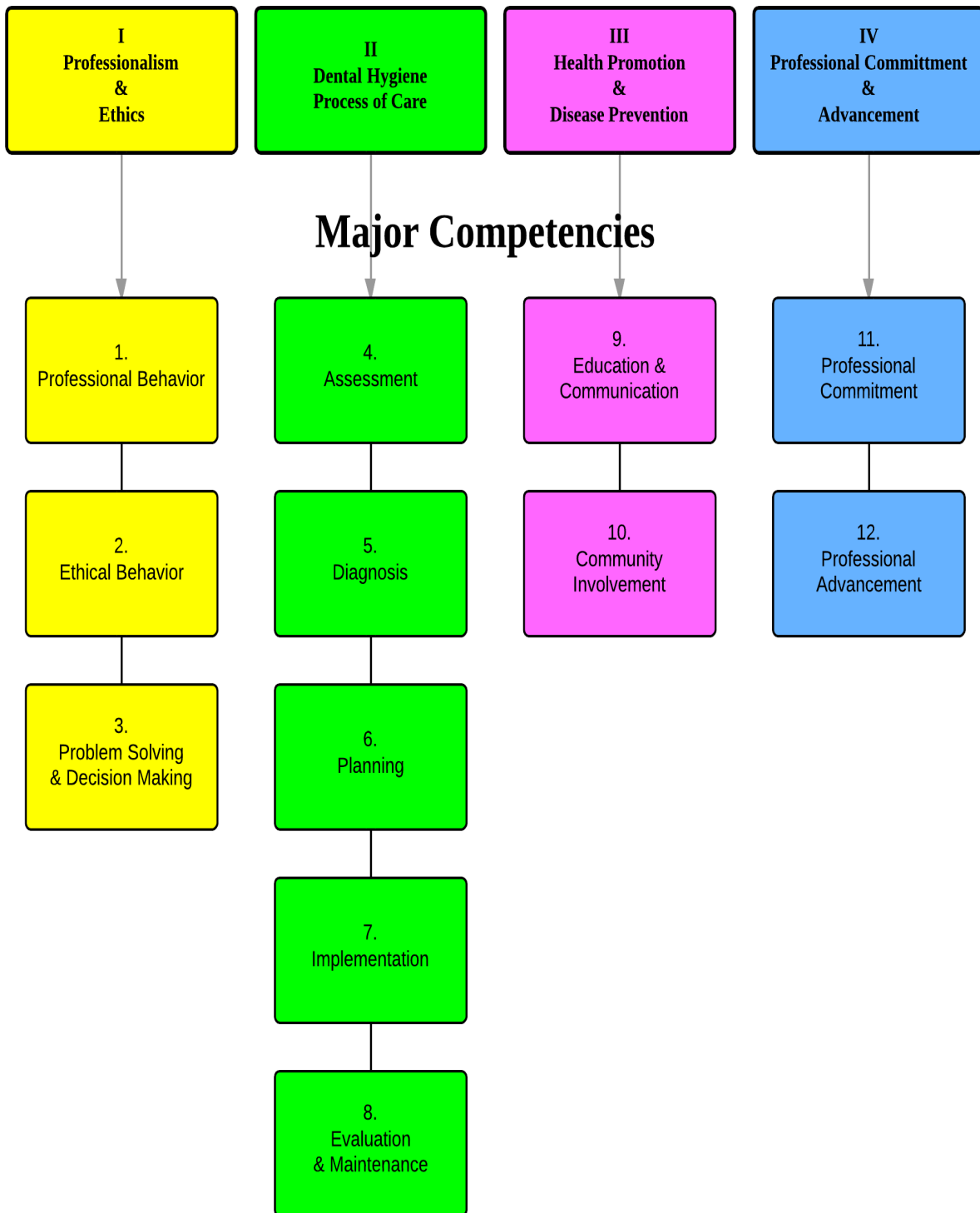
Supporting competencies are more specific abilities or “subdivisions” of the major competencies. Supporting competencies require more foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes, which must be mastered to demonstrate the major competency requirements. Examples of supporting competencies include the ability to "recognize medical conditions that may impact overall client care," "obtain medical consultations as needed," or "formulate goals and establish expected outcomes related to the dental hygiene diagnosis."

Foundational Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes

Foundational skills and knowledge are introduced to students through didactic courses, clinical instruction, and in the laboratory setting. These skills and experiences are needed to master the supporting competencies. The ability to use information and knowledge to answer questions either verbally or written on exams is foundational knowledge. The ability to follow a specific process or guideline in a standardized situation that produces a satisfactory result is considered a foundational skill. Foundational attitudes are supportive, rational and behavioral actions, such as positive intellectual and behavior actions, such as being sensitive to the cultural differences of a patient.

The supporting and major competencies formulate a framework for all course objectives introduced in the curriculum. Medical, dental, behavioral and clinical sciences provide foundational knowledge. Foundational abilities required to demonstrate competency in the clinical environment are acquired through information and psychomotor experiences obtained through didactic, group discussion, case studies, seminar and laboratory instruction.

Dental Hygiene Core Domains



I. Professionalism and Ethics

The professional dental hygienist provides clinical care using evidence-based knowledge, as well as professional judgment and skills. The dental hygienist is a licensed professional who must be capable of interpreting and managing ethical issues and problems in the workplace. As a dental hygienist, one must interact professionally with colleagues and auxiliary personnel. The dental hygienist must be able to understand and apply rapidly changing evidence-based information to a variety of roles in the work environment using critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

- 1. Professional Behavior:** Professional behavior requires a graduate to interact with a team approach, use effective communication skills, utilize interpersonal skills, accept feedback, adhere to protocol, document accurately, and utilize time management skills.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 1a. Assume responsibility of the dental hygiene actions and care based on the accepted standard of care.
- 1b. Provide accurate, consistent, and complete documentation, for all aspects of treatment in the dental hygiene process of care.
- 1c. Communicate professionally orally or in writing utilizing the principles of scientific writing with healthcare professionals and non-healthcare professionals.

- 2. Ethical Behavior:** The graduate must be competent in applying ethical, legal and regulatory concepts in the process of providing oral health care services.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 2a. Integrate the ADHA code of ethics in all aspects of professional endeavors.
- 2b. Adhere to local, state and federal laws, recommendations, and regulations in the provision of oral health care.
- 2c. Provide humane and compassionate care to all patients, maintain honesty and confidentiality in interactions with patients, interact with colleagues and auxiliary personnel without discrimination.
- 2d. Apply principals of risk management to manage professional risks and prevent liability issues.

- 3. Problem Solving & Decision Making:** The graduate must be able to use problem-solving strategies related to comprehensive patient care.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 3a. Evaluate the safety and efficacy of oral health products, interventions and treatments.

- 3b. Critically analyze published reports of oral health research, oral health products and treatments and apply this information to the practice of dental hygiene.

II. Dental Hygiene Process of Care

The dental hygiene graduate is a licensed oral health professional whose responsibilities include providing educational, preventive and therapeutic services in the support of attaining and maintaining optimal oral health. The dental hygiene process of care applies principles from biomedical, clinical and psychosocial sciences to diverse populations that may include medically compromised, intellectually or physically challenged, or socially or culturally disadvantaged patients.

- 4. Assessment:** The graduate, using critical thinking skills, must be able to thoroughly assess risk factors on all patients.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 4a. Assess patient's health status, concerns, goals and preferences to guide the process of care.
- 4b. Obtain, review, update and interpret an accurate medical / dental history and vital signs, and recognize conditions that require special precautions or considerations prior to or during dental hygiene care.
- 4c. Examine the head and neck and soft tissue structures using techniques of inspection and palpation, and evaluate patient responses for deviations from the normal range.
- 4d. Chart and record all existing conditions in the dentition using visual inspection and radiographs.
- 4e. Perform a comprehensive periodontal assessment to identify conditions that compromise periodontal health and function.
- 4f. Identify the need for radiographs. Differentiate normal from abnormal findings.
- 4g. Recognize predisposing etiological risk factors as well as patient habits that may require interventions to prevent the disease process.
- 4h. Take appropriate precautions for patients that have been identified as having medically compromising risk factors.
- 4i. Determine the need for additional care and refer to the appropriate health professional.

5. **Diagnosis:** The graduate must be able to use critical thinking skills to formulate an accurate dental hygiene diagnosis.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 5a. Analyze and interpret the data, unmet human needs and systemic conditions to formulate a dental hygiene diagnosis that collaborates with the dentist or other health professionals.
- 5b. Obtain appropriate medical consultations as needed.

6. **Planning:** The graduate must be able to formulate a patient centered treatment plan consistent with the assessment and diagnosis. The plan should establish realistic goals and interventions that facilitate optimal oral health.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 6a. Establish a planned sequence of educational, preventive, and therapeutic services with the active participation of the patient or guardian, based on the dental hygiene diagnosis.
- 6b. Formulate goals and expected outcomes related to the needs and desires of the patient based on the dental hygiene diagnosis.
- 6c. Plan treatment that reflects a patient's cultural differences in providing dental hygiene care.
- 6d. Develop dental hygiene care plans that reflect the impact of systemic disease.

7. **Implementation:** The graduate must be able to provide specialized care or treatment that includes educational, preventive, and therapeutic procedures to help the patient attain and maintain optimal oral health.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 7a. Utilize accepted infection control procedures.
- 7b. Obtain radiographs of diagnostic quality.
- 7c. Control pain and anxiety during treatment through the use of accepted clinical techniques that are within the scope and practice of a dental hygienist including local / topical anesthesia and the administration of nitrous oxide.
- 7d. Apply basic and advanced principles of dental hygiene instrumentation to avoid trauma in the process of removing deposits.
- 7e. Select and administer the appropriate chemotherapeutic agents and provide pre and post treatment instructions.
- 7f. Educate patients in preventive measures that control and reduce the risk for caries, periodontal disease and other oral conditions.

7g. Manage medical emergencies that arise during patient treatment.

- 8. Evaluation & Maintenance:** The graduate must be able to evaluate the effectiveness of planned clinical treatment and patient education and modify as necessary.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 8a. Determine the clinical outcomes of the dental hygiene procedures using indices, instrumentation, examination techniques and patient feedback to determine the appropriate re-care schedule.
- 8b. Re-evaluate goals, diagnosis, and services when expected outcomes are not achieved and modify treatments as necessary.
- 8c. Determine the patient's satisfaction level with the dental hygiene care received and the resulting oral health status achieved.
- 8d. Develop and maintain a periodontal maintenance program.

III. Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

The dental hygienist serves the community in both practice and public health settings. In the practice setting, the dental hygienist helps the patient attain and maintain optimal oral health and educates on its relationship to general health. Public health is concerned with promoting health and preventing disease in diverse populations through organized community efforts.

- 9. Self Care Education & Communication:** The graduate must be able to promote the values of oral and general health providing planned educational services and strategies to promote optimal oral health.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 9a. Identify factors that can be used to motivate patients for individual health promotion, prevention of disease and self-care regimens.
- 9b. Educate individuals about access to services available to patients needing oral health care.
- 9c. Identify the individual oral health needs of the patient and assist in the development of a self-care regimen.
- 9d. Encourage patients from diverse populations to assume responsibility for their health.

- 10. Community Involvement:** The graduate must be able to initiate and assume responsibility for promoting health and disease prevention activities for diverse patient populations in a variety of settings.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 10a. Promotes the value of oral health as it relates to general health and wellness to the public and organizations within and outside the profession.
- 10b. Introduce consumers to the healthcare system through education, screening and referrals.
- 10c. Provide dental hygiene services in collaboration with other healthcare providers in a variety of settings.

- IV. Professional Commitment & Advancement:** The graduate dental hygienist must make a commitment to professional development and lifelong learning. Knowledge of the scientific method ensures that actions taken by the dental hygienist are based on scientific evidence, and not merely tradition, intuition or personal preference. Complex issues of health policy, politics and professionalization require the dental hygienist to be critical thinkers in preparation for roles as leaders, organizers, and advocates.

- 11. Professional Commitment:** The dental hygiene graduate must be concerned with improving knowledge, skills and values of the profession.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 11a. Promote and Advance the importance of the profession by affiliation with professional organizations and participation through leadership and service activities.
- 11b. Prepare to fulfill the roles of a professional dental hygienist as defined by the ADHA.

- 12. Professional Advancement:** The dental hygiene graduate must pursue new knowledge on an annual basis to meet the continuing education requirements of his/her state and due to the ever-changing healthcare environment.

The graduate must be competent to:

- 12a. Pursue life-long learning to facilitate the advancement of the dental hygiene profession.
- 12b. Make professional decisions supported by evidenced-based scientific literature.
- 12c. Apply self-assessment strategies to ensure lifelong development of their personal knowledge and skills. (quality and ongoing)

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