

SUPERVISION

17. Can my hygienist see patients while I'm not in the office?

In New York State, the practice of dental hygiene must be performed under the supervision of a licensed dentist. There are two levels of supervision - personal and general.

Personal supervision means that the dentist is in the dental office or facility, personally diagnoses the condition to be treated, personally authorizes the procedure and, before dismissal of the patient, personally examines the condition after treatment is completed. Dental hygienists may perform the following services under the personal supervision of a licensed dentist only:

- placing or removing rubber dam;
- removing sutures;
- taking impressions for study casts (study casts shall mean only such casts as will be used for purposes of diagnosis and treatment planning by the dentist and for the purposes of patient education);
- placing or removing matrix bands;
- applying a topical medication not related to a complete dental prophylaxis;
- placing and removing periodontal dressings;
- selecting and prefitting provisional crowns;
- selecting and prefitting orthodontic bands;
- removing orthodontic arch wires and ligature ties;
- taking impressions for space maintainers, orthodontic appliances, and occlusal guards;
- placing and removing temporary separating devices
- placing orthodontic ligatures;
- bleaching; and
- procedures within the scope of practice of a NYS licensed certified dental assistant, which are not listed under general supervision.

General supervision means that a supervising dentist is available for consultation, diagnosis and evaluation, has authorized the dental hygienist to perform the services, and exercises that degree of supervision appropriate to the circumstances. General supervision does not mandate that the employing dentist be physically present in the office at all times. The definition described includes three parameters:

1. A supervising dentist must always be available — this could be another dentist down the hall or across the street who could be quickly summoned. In some situations, a conversation with the supervising dentist may suffice, as long as the supervising dentist could be quickly summoned should the need arise.
2. The treatment rendered by the dental hygienist is authorized in advance (proof of authorization, in the absence of the employer-dentist, should be written somewhere).
3. "... exercises that degree of supervision appropriate. . .," which means, for example, a patient new to the practice or a patient presenting a difficult management or medical problem should not appear on a day the dentist is not physically present in the office.

The relationship between the dentist and the dental hygienist requires that professional judgment be exercised in the above cited examples.

Dental hygienists may perform the following services under the general supervision of a licensed dentist:

- removing calcareous deposits, accretions and stains including scaling and planing of exposed root surfaces indicated for a complete prophylaxis;
- applying topical agents indicated for a complete dental prophylaxis;
- removing excess cement from surfaces of the teeth;
- providing patient education;
- placing and exposing X-ray films;
- performing topical anticariogenic agent applications, including but not limited to topical fluoride applications and performing topical anesthetic applications;
- polishing teeth, including existing restorations;
- taking medical history including the measuring and recording of vital signs;
- charting caries and periodontal conditions as an aid to diagnosis by the dentist;
- applying pit and fissure sealants; and
- applying desensitizing agents to the teeth.

Please remember that under Part 29 of the Rules of the Board of Regents, it is considered unprofessional conduct for a licensee to perform any service that is beyond his or her individual professional competence, even if that service is within his or her scope of practice.