

EDHF Resolution

Professional Profile and Competences of Dental Hygienists in Europe

As unanimously adopted by the EDHF General Assembly
on 12 September 2015 (Dublin) and
revised on 4 August 2016 and 21 September 2019

Competences of Dental Hygienists

The dental hygienist is the key provider of preventive oral care (primary, secondary and tertiary prevention) in order to promote and improve the oral health of individuals, families and groups in society. The dental hygienist possesses the necessary professional qualifications and is able to provide patient-centered, holistic and evidence based preventive oral care independently. The dental hygienist must possess a wide range of competences, knowledge and skills in order to provide the highest quality of patient care at all times. The right to carry the title of dental hygienist is restricted to the person to whom a certificate is given issued by an authority in a Member State certifying successful completion of professional training at higher vocational or university level according to the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF level 6) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (with a minimum of 180 ECTS credits).

Competence Domain I:

Professionalism

After graduating from professional training, a dental hygienist must be competent to:

1. Execute the scope of practice of a dental hygienist according to the current state of science (evidence based preventive oral care) and/or to the professional standard (practice based preventive oral care)
2. Recognize and deal with ethical dilemmas which can present themselves in oral healthcare and acknowledge patient's rights, particularly with regard to confidentiality and informed consent
3. Acquire, analyse and process relevant information, provide goal-oriented information to and communicate effectively with patients, their relatives, colleagues, the dental team and other health professionals involved in the care of the patient
4. Practise the profession in an interprofessional environment with respect and understanding for each other's professional skills and competences with the purpose to strengthen patient centered care
5. Act with a proper understanding of contemporary laws, legal and other rulings involved in the care of individual patients, populations and society
6. Recognize and acknowledge his own restrictions and limitations in providing oral care
7. Recognize, take responsibility for and act to raise concerns about his own or others health, behavior and professional performance
8. Evaluate and analyse his own care quality to improve his own professional practice for the entire professional career and commit to lifelong learning.

9. Implement a systematic approach to the delivery of safe, high quality patient centered clinical services.
10. Consider implementing changes within the team and the wider practice environment that will significantly improve patient care, efficiency and sustainability of resources

Competence Domain II:

Knowledge base and information literacy

After graduating from professional training a dental hygienist must be competent to:

1. Apply knowledge and understanding of the biological, biomedical, behavioral, technical and clinical sciences in order to recognize the difference between normal and pathological conditions/disorders relevant to clinical preventive oral health practice
2. Understand interactions between oral health and general health with the aim of contributing to the improvement of the quality of life
3. Recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information
4. Have the ability to search, analyse and critically examine relevant literature and information
5. Apply this in a critical, scientific and effective manner for the care of patients
6. Apply knowledge, insight, judgement, communication and learning skills in the implementation of practice-oriented research.

Competence Domain III:

Patient centered care

3.1 Screening, clinical examination, diagnosis and treatment planning

After graduating from professional training a dental hygienist must be competent to:

1. Obtain an anamnesis from the patient on oral healthcare, containing his dental, medical, personal and socio-cultural backgrounds in order to be able to assess the implications of deviations of general health and the use of pharmaceutical drugs on the execution of preventive oral treatment
2. Examine and assess the dental condition and the tissues surrounding the teeth in relation to the oral-biofilm related disorders in the area of cariology and periodontology

3. Screen for dental defects or other defects in oral health, observing visible deviations and abnormalities of the normal view and referral to a dentist or physician if necessary
4. Perform dental imaging diagnostics and taking measures to protect from ionizing radiation from X-rays
5. Establish a diagnosis in relation to the plaque related disorders on the basis of acquired data, design a plan of treatment and if necessary consult with and/or refer patients to other health professionals within the oral care team or other professionals in healthcare
6. Obtain valid consent from the patient before starting treatment, explaining all the relevant options and possible costs and identify where patient's needs may differ from the treatment plan and refer patients for advice when and where appropriate.

3.2 Therapy and maintaining oral health

1. Provide treatment to prevent or diminish disease of the teeth and/or of the oral tissues
2. Undertake non-surgical treatments to remove supra-gingival and sub-gingival hard and soft deposits and stains using a range of methods
3. Assess and manage the health of periodontal and soft tissues taking in account risk and lifestyle factors and using appropriate indices
4. Apply local anesthesia by infiltration or local application supporting the examinations or for the treatment
5. Apply anti-microbial therapy to manage plaque related diseases
6. Apply topical treatments and fissure sealants
7. Maintain dental implants and treat the peri-implant tissues
8. Identify and manage dental fear and anxiety, employing appropriate techniques and referring to psychological services when appropriate
9. Carry out Basic Life Support & Defibrillation for cardiac arrest and immediate appropriate management of all other emergencies that may occur in the course of the oral hygiene practice
10. Record and document relevant data about the patient and their treatment
11. Analyse and evaluate the results of the treatment and the patient satisfaction.

Competence Domain IV:

Oral health in society

After graduating from professional training a dental hygienist must be competent to:

1. Promote, establish and maintain optimal oral health for individuals, families and groups in society and prevent oral diseases
2. Develop comprehensive prevention programs for individuals, families and groups in society
3. Set priorities for preventive oral health care to be delivered according to the necessity to treat, the care demand by the patient and the available means
4. Acquire insight in the epidemiology and the need for oral care of the population as a whole and the possibilities for intervention to do so
5. Identify and prevent health risks relevant and supportive to oral health and general health (diet, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, systemic diseases, etc.)
6. Motivate lifestyle changes in order to maintain oral health and general health as well as to improve the quality of life
7. Monitor, analyze and evaluate the results of therapeutic interventions and reinforce good practices on maintaining good oral health with all patients.
8. Engage with individuals and organizations to address oral health inequalities.

This document was developed by the EDHF to contribute to the amendment of the Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC. Its content is based upon the following reference documents:

- General Dental Council of the United Kingdom: Scope of Practice for Dentists, Clinical dental technicians, Dental therapists, Dental hygienists, Orthodontic therapists, Dental nurses (effective from 30 September 2013)
- National Board of Health and Welfare, Sweden: Competence Description for Registered Dental Hygienist, Article No. 2005-105-1 (effective from 2 October 2005)
- Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports of The Netherlands: Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Volume 2006 nr. 147 (effective from 21 February 2006)
- Council of European Dentists (CED) and the Association of Dental Education in Europe (ADEE): Competences of Dental Practitioners, CED-DOC-2013-030-E (effective from 6 June 2014)