



Eli Eliav

## Is it time for expansion of the scope of dentistry?

Dentists are required to go through extensive training in order to become licensed to practice dentistry and must go through further training to specialize in one of the disciplines of dentistry. The scope of this training has evolved over the years from dealing solely with the teeth and the supporting periodontal structures to comprehensive oral care. Although the scope of the practice of dentistry may vary in different countries, today dentists all over the world are trained to be health providers that treat the patient, and not only their teeth.

The American Dental Association's definition of dentistry is pretty broad and reflects the diversity of modern dentistry: "The evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body; provided by a dentist, within the scope of his/her education, training and experience, in accordance with the ethics of the profession and applicable law."<sup>1</sup> This definition requires dentists to learn and understand not only anatomy of a limited area, but entire body physiology, pathology, and treatment.

Current trends include a marked decline in tooth decay among patients accompanied by a reduction in traditional dental treatment patients. On the other hand we see an increase in the number of older patients, probably with more background diseases, who are looking for dental treatment. Accommodating this trend will require dentists to take into consideration the patients' general health, and may be an opportunity to expand the scope of the dental profession.

Discussions are already emerging on the provision by dentists of salivary diagnostics, smoking cessation, and blood pressure and glucose level monitoring. The range of procedures dentists are allowed to perform is generally dictated by health administrations as well as state boards, and it is possible that the medical community in some places may not favor expansion of the scope of the dental profession. However, part of dentistry's future success will be attributed to the development and continued growth of the scope of dentistry. We have to define our own goals, and educate our students, residents, and peers.

Providing high-end dental treatment is becoming progressively complex, and specialists trained in a specific discipline are becoming at times more isolated from participation in general health or dental care. Therefore expansion of the scope of specialties in dentistry should be considered as well. This will require increased interaction between associated medical specialties in medical centers and private practices. A positive example of this is oral and maxillofacial surgery, where the training may include acquiring a degree in general medicine as well. This has allowed oral and maxillofacial surgeons to expand the range of treatments they can provide.

It is time to start the discussion on the future scope of dentistry, for the benefit of both the patients and the profession at large.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eli Eliav".

Eli Eliav  
Editor-in-Chief

1. American Dental Association website: Scope of Practice. Available at: <http://www.ada.org/2458.aspx> (accessed 23 March 2014).