



PENNSYLVANIA STATE BOARD OF DENTISTRY



Secretary Carol Aichele

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EFDA Utilization

By John E. Definnis, DDS

Please allow me to explain my use of Expanded Function Dental Assistants (EFDAs) and how it evolved in our group practice of five dentists. As a 1968 graduate of dental school, I was anxious to start my own practice and, for the first three or four years, I was only interested in honing my own skills and just needed a good dental assistant. Regardless of our education, on-the-job training is part of a normal learning curve in any profession, and even more so in EFDA training.

Practicing in the early '70s in a rural area, a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) was rare, and the term EFDA was non-existent. Our local vo-tech school taught an introductory course in nursing and dental assisting. Hiring several of these highly-motivated students resulted in some dedicated employees who have been with our practice for more than 20 years.

As Pennsylvania's laws changed, allowing assistants to do reversible procedures, we began allowing experienced dental assistants to try some procedures. As this on-the-job work evolved, a confidence and an expectation developed between doctor and assistant. It happened very slowly and as some assistants showed a higher skill level over Class I restorations, we began trusting their skills on larger and more difficult restorations. Additional motivation and enthusiasm occurred as we rewarded them with pay raises tied to their clinical skills.

To this day, certain restorations I will not relegate because I feel the procedure is just too difficult for his or her abilities, or because of my knowledge of the patient's dental tolerance. I would not subject an EFDA to an extreme gagger, an uncooperative or an overly fearful dental patient. Fortunately, most patients are very

receptive to an EFDA, especially if the dentist explains their role and that the treatment they receive will be directed by and evaluated by the dentist. Also, the patient needs to know that he or she can refuse to accept an EFDA's treatment, even after EFDA treatment has started.

I think a lot of us feel it is dentistry's obligation to provide more access to care, and employing EFDAs is a huge step in that direction. We need to welcome training facilities and education to improve the skills and capabilities of EFDAs and assistants. Beyond a doubt, however, without training dental students and current dentists in how to use this allied help, we will fall short. Changing a practitioner's long term habits is very difficult, but we must encourage them and show the benefits of EFDA utilization. Of course, not every dentist is a candidate for an EFDA's use, and as we always tell our new associates, "First and foremost is to practice within your own personality."

We must continue to promote the benefits of EFDA utilization, which are many. The EFDA maximizes productivity and profitability. They can be used to improve access to care for the underserved population, and provide a way to deal with dental workforce shortages. They can give the dentist more time to deal with more pressing issues, as well as promote scheduling flexibility to accommodate more emergency care. EFDAs help to reduce stress in the dental office and help the dentist to practice longer into retirement years.

Nothing gives me more pleasure during a hygiene exam than to see a beautifully carved amalgam or composite with clean margins, in place for more than 10 years – and then realize that I did not place that restoration. It was one of our EFDAs. I have great respect and appreciation for that extra set of hands in our operatory.

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EFDA Information

By R. Ivan Lugo, DMD

The dental law requires permanent certification and regulation of the Expanded Function Dental Assistant (EFDA). The State Board of Dentistry regulates the practice of EFDAs. The EFDA functions under the direct supervision of the dentist, and works as a part of the

dental team providing patient care. Complaints arising from work delegated to an EFDA may result in disciplinary action taken by the Board not only against the EFDA, but the supervising dentist as well.

To perform expanded functions under the direct supervision of a dentist licensed in Pennsylvania, a dental assistant must be certified as an EFDA by the State Board of Dentistry. Certification and examination information, as well as application procedures can be found at www.dos.state.pa.us/dent.