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New Survey of Mass. Dentists Points to Need for Highly Trained Dental Practitioners

Significant volume of complex oral health care issues among patients underscores rationale for dental care delivered by properly trained and supervised practitioners

Southborough, MA—April 5, 2017— A new survey of nearly 400 Massachusetts dentists conducted by the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) revealed that nearly one in four patients in Massachusetts requires care for advanced or complex dental needs. The survey also reported that 97 percent of respondents support a high level of credentialing standards for mid-level dental professionals in Massachusetts.

“Given the significant volume of dental patients in Massachusetts with substantial oral health care needs, there is no question that any future mid-level dental professionals must be required to have the highest possible level of training, education and supervision,” said Dr. David Lustbader, DMD, president-elect of the Massachusetts Dental Society.

In January, the MDS filed legislation on Beacon Hill that provides a comprehensive approach to oral health care issues facing the Commonwealth. The bill, which is focused on care for underserved populations and additional resources that can help to address socio-economic barriers that impact dental care for lower-income Massachusetts residents, would require mid-level dental professionals to receive the same level of education, training and supervision as Physicians’ Assistants (PA) and Nurse Practitioners (NP) in the field of medicine.

The MDS regularly surveys members about issues of importance to the dental community. The latest survey revealed that 97 percent of respondents believe the introduction of mid-level dental practitioners in Massachusetts should be contingent upon mandatory credentialing and oversight standards that are nearly identical to educational, training and supervision requirements set forth for PAs and NPs. In addition, 90 percent of respondents stated that newly licensed mid-level professionals should be required to treat patients in areas designated by the federal government as “dental provider shortage areas” and in federally qualified health centers.

According to the MDS survey, more than 60 percent of respondents say a quarter of their patients suffer from advanced or complex dental problems. Nearly 40 percent of respondents say an even greater percentage of patients require advanced or complex care, with 15 percent of respondents noting that one in two patients is diagnosed with complicated maladies.

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