

DHAA and BMS Joint Position Statement

Dental Hygienists and Oral Health Therapists treatment of patients that have been administered relative analgesia, conscious sedation or general anaesthesia.

The Dental Hygienists Association of Australia (DHAA) is the peak professional body representing dental hygienists and oral health therapists in Australia. The mission of the Association is to support the continuing development of the oral health professions and preventive models of care. The DHAA also provides industry support and advice to its members.

The DHAA and BMS Risk Solutions¹ have prepared a position statement to clarify the scope of practice of a dental hygienist or oral health therapist in relation to treating patients that have been administered relative analgesia (nitrous oxide) or conscious sedation or general anaesthesia.

Risks of analgesia and sedation

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists Guidelines on Sedation and/or Analgesia for Diagnostic and Interventional Medical, Dental or Surgical Procedures describe the following risks:

Practitioners who administer procedural sedation and/or analgesia should be aware that the transition from complete consciousness through the various depths of sedation to general anaesthesia is a continuum and not a set of discrete, well-defined stages. The margin of safety of drugs used to achieve sedation and/or analgesia varies widely between patients and loss of consciousness with its attendant risk of loss of protective reflexes may occur rapidly and unexpectedly. Therefore practitioners who administer sedative or analgesic drugs that alter the conscious state of a patient, and those who supervise recovery from sedation, must be prepared to manage the following potential risks:

- *Depression of protective airway reflexes and loss of airway patency.*
- *Depression of respiration.*
- *Depression of the cardiovascular system.*
- *Drug interactions or adverse reactions, including anaphylaxis.*
- *Unexpectedly high sensitivity to the drugs used for procedural sedation and/or analgesia which may result in unintentional loss of consciousness, and respiratory or cardiovascular depression.*
- *Individual variations in response to the drugs used, particularly in children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing disease.*
- *The possibility of deeper sedation or anaesthesia being used to compensate for inadequate analgesia or local anaesthesia.*
- *Risks inherent in the wide variety of procedures performed under procedural sedation and/or analgesia.*

The Dental Board of Australia emphasise the expectation that the treating clinician has an overarching responsibility to maintain patient safety throughout procedures. The code of conduct states:

Practitioners have a duty to make the care of patients or clients their first concern and to practise safely and effectively.

¹ BMS is the official insurance broker for the DHAA Indemnity Insurance Program. BMS is an abbreviation for Ballantyne, McKean and Sullivan, the three original founders of the company.

Minimising risk to patients or clients is a fundamental component of practice. Good practice involves understanding and applying the key principles of risk minimisation and management to practice.

Relative Analgesia (nitrous oxide)

Dental hygienists and oral health therapists are not qualified to administer nitrous oxide to their patients.

Dental hygienists and oral health therapists are only permitted to treat patients under the influence of nitrous oxide when all of the following three conditions are met:

1. The administering dentist or anaesthetist stays in the room to monitor the patient;
2. The dental hygienist/oral health therapist has received education and training in treating patients under nitrous oxide in a program of study approved by the National Board; and
3. The dental hygienist/oral health therapist is deemed competent.

During nitrous oxide administration there must always be a minimum of two personnel in the room monitoring the patient. One of them must be the administering clinician. Both must have training in monitoring sedation.

Conscious sedation

Dental hygienists and oral health therapists are not qualified to administer conscious sedation to their patients. Only dentists or dental specialists who have received endorsement from the Dental Board of Australia may administer conscious sedation.

Further, dental hygienists and oral health therapists are not permitted to treat patients under conscious sedation. The Dental Board of Australia's Endorsement for Conscious Sedation registration standard specifies that dental procedures on sedated patients may only be provided by dentists and dental specialists.

General anaesthesia

Dental hygienists and oral health therapists are not qualified to administer general anaesthesia to their patients.

Given that general anaesthetic is associated with a higher risk of complications than conscious sedation, it is the Association's position that dental hygienists and oral health therapists should not treat patients under general anaesthetic.

References

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists. (2014) Guidelines on Sedation and/or Analgesia for Diagnostic and Interventional Medical, Dental or Surgical Procedures (PS09). Accessed on 28 August 2017 from URL

<http://www.anzca.edu.au/documents/ps09-2014-guidelines-on-sedation-and-or-analgesia>

Dental Board of Australia. (2015) Endorsement for Conscious Sedation registration standard. Accessed on 28 August 2017 from URL <http://www.dentalboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx>

Dental Board of Australia. (2014) Code of conduct. Accessed on 28 August 2017 from URL <http://www.dentalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines/Policies-Codes-Guidelines/Code-of-conduct.aspx>