

REPORT OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE ON DENTAL ASSISTING EDUCATION TO THE COMMISSION ON DENTAL ACCREDITATION

Committee Chair: Ms. Martha McCaslin. Committee Members: Ms. Julie Bera, Ms. Kimberly Bland, Dr. Jennifer Boyce, Ms. Heather Ferris, Dr. Preeti Sahasi (attended a portion of the meeting virtually), Ms. Staci Schory (attended a portion of the meeting virtually), Ms. Heather Seghi (attended a portion of the meeting virtually), Ms. Diana Williams, and Dr. Tia Young (attended virtually). Guests (Open Session Only, Virtual): Ms. Rebecca Stolberg, vice president, Allied Dental Education and Faculty Development, American Dental Education Association (ADEA), attended the policy portion of the meeting. Staff Members: Ms. Jamie Asher Hernandez, manager, Allied Dental Education, Ms. Katie Navickas, manager, Allied Dental Education, Mr. Daniel Sloyan, coordinator, Allied Program Reviews, and Ms. Zaira Limon Perez, senior project assistant, Allied Dental Education, Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). Dr. Sherin Tooks, senior director, CODA, and Ms. Samara Schwartz, senior associate general counsel, CODA, attended a portion of the meeting. The meeting of the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education (DA RC) was held on January 11-12, 2024 at the ADA Headquarters, Chicago, Illinois.

CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO DENTAL ASSISTING EDUCATION

Informational Report on Dental Assisting Education Programs Annual Survey Curriculum Data (p. 300): The Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education (DA RC) noted that data of the Annual Survey Curriculum section for dental assisting education is reviewed as an informational report, when the materials are available following data collection and analysis. All survey data is considered confidential at the programmatic level.

At the Winter 2024 meeting, the DA RC considered and discussed the most recent data for the Curriculum Section of the Commission's Annual Survey for dental assisting education (**Appendix 1, Policy Report p. 300**). The Curriculum Section of the Commission's Annual Survey is conducted for dental assisting education in alternate years. The most recent Curriculum Section was conducted in September/October 2023.

Recommendation: This report is informational in nature and no action is requested.

Consideration of Standard 2-1 (Admissions) of the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs (p. 301): At the Summer 2023 meeting of the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education (DA RC), the DA RC discussed a new business item related to Dental Assisting Standard 2-1, which requires a high-school diploma or its equivalent for admission into a CODA-accredited dental assisting education program.

Dental Assisting Standard 2-1 states: *Admission of students **must** be based on specific published criteria, procedures and policies that include a high-school diploma or its equivalent, or post-secondary degree. Previous academic performance or other predictors of scholastic aptitude and ability **must** be utilized as criteria in selecting students with the potential to successfully*

*complete the program. Applicants **must** be informed of the criteria and procedures for selection, goals of the program, curricular content, course transferability, scope of practice and employment opportunities for dental assistants.*

In its Summer 2023 discussion, the Committee believed that, in the past, high school students were able to enroll in CODA-accredited dental assisting programs and receive a certificate of completion from the CODA-accredited dental assisting program upon graduation from high school. The DA RC discussed the rationale for the requirement of a high-school diploma or its equivalent and determined the need for more data regarding how changing this standard may impact dental assisting programs. The DA RC noted that in some states students cannot perform dental assisting skills and functions until they reach a certain age, which is often post-secondary. Additionally, the DA RC noted that CODA-accredited dental assisting programs may admit students through advanced standing policies and procedures when those students have completed equivalent didactic, laboratory and/or preclinical content prior to admission to the CODA-accredited program. Further, CODA-accredited programs must remain at the post-secondary level of instruction due to CODA's scope as an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education. Following discussion, the DA RC believed there should be no change at that time related to Standard 2-1 (Admissions) and this Standard should be further reviewed at the Winter 2024 DA RC meeting. The informational report on this matter was considered by the Commission in Summer 2023.

At its Winter 2024 meeting, the Review Committee discussed the need for a data driven analysis to further consider modifying or removing the requirement for a high-school diploma or its equivalent requirement in accordance with state requirements. The Committee discussed what information and data is needed and can be obtained to conduct an analysis regarding this matter. It was suggested that state dental boards be surveyed to determine the number of states that have alternative training programs and to determine how many states have age requirements for dental assisting skills and functions, and radiography. The Committee believed that some of this data from state dental boards may be difficult to obtain. The DA RC also recommended that CODA contact the American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA) and the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) for this data. It was also determined that CODA staff could compile data on programs that currently offer Advanced Standing in admissions. Additionally, the Commission could seek input from the United States Department of Education on expectations of recognized accrediting agencies related to enrollment of secondary students in post-secondary educational programs, and minimal program length for programs under the Commission's purview. The Committee further noted CODA could remind the dental assisting education community that the current Accreditation Standards permit admission of students with advanced standing.

Following discussion, the DA RC concluded that Dental Assisting Standard 2-1 (Admissions) and the related data should be further reviewed during the DA RC's considered of the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs that will be conducted in Spring 2024.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation direct the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education to further consider potential revision to Dental Assisting Standard 2-1 (Admissions) in conjunction with the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs that will be conducted in Spring 2024.

Informational Report on the Conduct of a Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs (p. 302): The Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs were adopted by the Commission on Dental Accreditation at its August 2, 2019 meeting for implementation on July 1, 2020.

As stated in the Commission’s “Policy on Assessing the Validity and Reliability of the Accreditation Standards” (**Appendix 1, Policy Report p. 302**), the Commission believes that a minimum time span should elapse between the adoption of new standards or implementation of standards that have undergone a comprehensive revision and the assessment of the validity and reliability of these standards. This minimum period of time is directly related to the academic length of the accredited programs in each discipline. The Commission believes this minimum period is essential in order to allow time for programs to implement the new standards and to gain experience in each year of the curriculum.

The Commission’s policy for assessment is based on the following formula: *The validity and reliability of accreditation standards will be assessed after they have been in effect for a period of time equal to the minimum academic length of the accredited program plus three years.*

Thus, the validity and reliability of the new standards for a one-year program will be assessed after four years, while standards applying to programs four years in length will be assessed seven years after implementation.

Accordingly, the validity and reliability study for dental assisting will be initiated in the spring of 2024. Survey results will be considered at the Summer 2024 meeting of the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education and the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

In cooperation with the ADA’s HPI, a timetable will be developed, surveys will be distributed to the audiences, and responses will be due to the HPI within two weeks of receipt of the survey. A sample format of the survey is presented in **Appendix 2, Policy Report p. 302**. Following a period of follow-up with non-respondents, the data will be tabulated and analysis completed by June 1, 2024. Commission staff will prepare a report with results of the study for consideration by the Commission at its Summer 2024 meeting.

Recommendation: This report is informational in nature and no action is required.

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Dental Assisting Program Closure and Discontinuance of Accreditation (p. 303): At the Summer 2023 meeting, the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education (DA RC), discussed the decline in Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA)-accredited dental assisting programs due to program closure, program discontinuance, and teach-out. The Committee recalled that at a prior meeting (in Summer 2022), the DA RC recommended to CODA that the Standing Committee on Documentation and Policy Reviews review and revise, as needed, the policy and procedure for reporting program closure/discontinuance/teach-out reports to provide the Commission with information as to the reasons why dental assisting programs discontinue CODA-accreditation. The Commission concurred with the recommendation and since revision of the policy, the Commission has collected information from CODA-accredited dental assisting programs that have reported closure/discontinuance/teach-out.

At its Summer 2023 meeting, the DA RC discussed the information gathered on program closures and discontinuances of accreditation, noting programs have found it difficult to hire faculty with the current faculty requirements in the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs; many states do not require graduation from a CODA-accredited dental assisting program to practice as a dental assistant; institutions can operate non-CODA-accredited dental assisting programs; and institutions find it costly to operate a CODA-accredited dental assisting program. After lengthy discussion, the DA RC believed that an Ad Hoc Committee should be formed and include members of the DA RC and CODA Commissioners who are dentists and dental educators to further review the issue of CODA-accredited dental assisting program voluntary discontinuance of accreditation. The DA RC also believed that requesting data from other dental associations could be helpful to study this topic.

At its Summer 2023 meeting, the Commission on Dental Accreditation directed the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee of available members of the Dental Assisting Review Committee and Commissioners who are dentists and dental educators to further study the trend of voluntary withdrawal of CODA accreditation by CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs, with a report for further consideration by the Dental Assisting Review Committee and Commission in Winter 2024.

At its Winter 2024 meeting, the DA RC reviewed the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Dental Assisting Program Closure and Discontinuance of Accreditation (**Policy Report p. 303**). The DA RC agreed with the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations, noting that it is difficult for some programs to hire qualified faculty, that some states do not require graduation from a CODA-accredited program prior to practice, and the cost of dental assisting education may all be contributing factors to the decline in dental assisting programs. The DA RC noted it recently recommended, and the Commission concurred, that Standard 3-6 be revised to allow dental assisting faculty time to complete educational degrees while teaching in a CODA-accredited dental assisting program. It was also noted that students now seek shorter programs and may move from dental assisting into dental hygiene due to enhanced salary opportunities.

The DA RC also noted that the American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA), as the professional association that advocates for dental assistants, should work with the American Dental Association (ADA) and others to increase understanding of the value of hiring graduates of CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs. The DA RC also noted that the ADA's Council on Dental Education and Licensure (CDEL) was recently directed through the 2024 ADA House of Delegates to study the issue of encouraging students into allied dental programs and careers. The DA RC believed that CODA should communicate with the CDEL to urge CDEL and the ADA to support and encourage students to attend CODA-accredited dental assisting programs as a pathway to the profession.

Following considerable discussion, the DA RC also concurred with the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee that the Commission obtain additional information from its broad community of interest related to the decline in CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs. To further study this issue, the Commission on Dental Accreditation should communicate with the CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs, the American Dental Association (ADA), American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA), Dental Assisting National Board (DANB), state dental boards, and state dental associations, to request the following information:

1. the current state of dental assisting education programs (locally and/or nationally, as applicable), including practice requirements, numbers of programs in the state (CODA-accredited and non-CODA-accredited), changes in dental assisting education, and changes in dental assisting practice;
2. the current issues related to CODA-accredited dental assisting program closures (for example, funding/lack of resources, lack of student interest in the profession, lack of interest in attending a formal program, state practice requirements, etc.); and
3. data on enrollment in CODA-accredited dental assisting programs and, if declining, the reasons for the decline including limitations/barriers to full enrollment and data from educational programs and their admissions/career guidance counselors on the reasons why students choose other program options and/or reasons why dental assisting programs are unable to fully enroll.

Following collection and review of the data from CODA's communities of interest, the Commission's Ad Hoc Committee on Dental Assisting Program Closure and Discontinuance of Accreditation could continue its review of the topic of program closures and discontinuance of dental assisting education programs to formulate strategies that may be used by the Commission in order to reduce the decline in CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation communicate with the CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs, the American Dental Association (ADA), American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA), Dental Assisting National Board (DANB), state dental boards, and state dental associations, to request the information noted in items 1-3, above.

It is further recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation direct development of educational materials for the public and academic institutions to emphasize the value of CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs.

It is further recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation direct a formal communication to the American Dental Association's Council on Dental Education and Licensure (ADA-CDEL) to urge CDEL and the ADA to support and encourage students to attend CODA-accredited dental assisting education programs as a pathway to the profession.

Consideration of Proposed Revisions to Improve Diversity in Dental and Dental Related Education Programs (p. 304): On December 1, 2023, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) received a letter from The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity (TNCDHE). The request is found in **Appendix 1, Policy Report p. 304**. In its letter, TNCDHE provides short-term and long-term suggestions to CODA to improve diversity in all academic dental, allied dental, and advanced dental education programs.

At its Winter 2024 meeting, the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education (DA RC) reviewed the letter from The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity. After discussion, the DA RC determined that there is a need to address diversity and inclusivity within dental assisting educational programs, specifically in providing training to dental assisting students and faculty on treating diverse patient populations. The DA RC also discussed and referenced current demographic data for dental assisting educational programs collected through the CODA Annual Survey for dental assisting. Through review of the Annual Survey data, the DA RC determined that the demographics for dental assisting students may be more diverse than other allied dental education disciplines. It was also determined that the issue of diversity and inclusivity should be reviewed in conjunction with the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs to be conducted Spring 2024. The DA RC noted that the Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs could be used as a resource for Standards related to diversity and inclusivity when reviewing the Dental Assisting Standards.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation direct the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education to further review the issue of diversity and inclusivity in conjunction with the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs to be conducted Spring 2024.

Consideration of Faculty to Student Ratios in Accreditation Standards (p. 305): At its Winter 2023 meeting, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) considered a letter from 17 state dental associations related to workforce shortages in dental assisting and dental hygiene education programs. The Commission discussed the letter and directed that a formal letter be sent to the state dental associations requesting additional information on the request, and that an Ad Hoc Committee be established to consider ratios within the Commission's Accreditation

Standards. The Ad Hoc Committee conducted an extensive review of the issues surrounding the state dental associations' request. Following review of faculty to student ratios in Accreditation Standards, the Ad Hoc Committee submitted its report (**Appendix 1, Policy Report p. 305**), to the Commission for consideration at its Summer 2023 meeting.

In Summer 2023, the Commission reviewed the report and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty to Student Ratios in Accreditation Standards. Following review, the Commission concurred with the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee and directed that the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty to Student Ratios in Accreditation Standards be provided to the Review Committees that oversee dental assisting, dental hygiene, dental laboratory technology, and dental therapy education for further consideration and review, including determination if revisions of Accreditation Standards are warranted, with a report to the Commission in Winter 2024. The Commission also directed that there be no development of a policy or process for rationale that must be followed when revising Accreditation Standards related to faculty to student ratios, and that a copy of the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty to Student Ratios in Accreditation Standards be provided to the state dental associations.

At its Winter 2024 meeting, the DA RC reviewed the report and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty to Student Ratios in Accreditation Standards. The DA RC discussed and concurred with the Ad Hoc Committee's findings and conclusions. The DA RC noted that the top three factors negatively affecting program enrollment in dental assisting programs are: 1) student interest in the program; 2) student attrition; and 3) ability to hire and retain a sufficient number of qualified faculty to maintain ratios required by CODA standards. The DA RC further discussed additional factors regarding faculty to student ratios for dental assisting such as time management, student interest in the dental assisting profession during the COVID-19 pandemic, issue with dental assisting programs having to adhere to dental hygiene faculty to student ratios when there is a dental assisting and dental hygiene program at the same institution, and programs not enrolling to capacity.

Following discussion, the DA RC again noted it had recently revised Standard 3-6 of the Dental Assisting Standards to allow faculty to work on educational degrees while teaching in dental assisting programs. The DA RC also noted that it is already addressing the topic of faculty-to-student ratios in CODA Accreditation Standards through its consideration of program closure, and will further consider this topic in conjunction with the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs to be conducted Spring 2024.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Commission on Dental Accreditation direct the Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education to further review the faculty-to-student ratios for dental assisting in conjunction with the Validity and Reliability Study for the Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs to be conducted Spring 2024.

**CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS RELATING TO
MORE THAN ONE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Matters related to more than one review committee are included in a separate report.

**CONSIDERATION OF SITE VISITOR APPOINTMENTS TO THE
COMMISSION ON DENTAL ACCREDITATION IN THE AREA OF
DENTAL ASSISTING EDUCATION**

The Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education considered site visitor appointments for 2024-2025. The Committee's recommendations on the appointments of individuals are included in a separate report.

CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO ACCREDITATION STATUS

Matters related to accreditation status of programs are included in a separate report.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Martha McCaslin
Chair, Review Committee on Dental Assisting Education