

Under the *Health Professions Act*, registered dental hygienists (RDH) in Alberta are not authorized to perform the restricted activity of prescribing oral sedatives. In addition, education for treating clients under oral sedation is not an entry-to-practice requirement and RDHs do not graduate with these competencies. Competencies would include the ability to monitor and respond to deeper levels of sedation than intended or to respond to adverse events.

To address clients who have been orally sedated, The College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta (CRDHA) referred to the 2011 Alberta Dental Association and College's (ADA&C) *Standard of Practice: Use of Sedation in Non-Hospital Dental Practice*, which stated:

2E2.2 Patients undergoing sedation must be supervised by an appropriately trained dentist and must never be left unattended while sedated.

This previous standard would not allow for an RDH to treat the sedated client without the dentist present in the operatory.

In January 2021, ADA&C released their *Standard of Practice for Minimal and Moderate Sedation in Non-Hospital Dental Practice* which updated the standards for dentists. This document now states that for patients under oral sedation (12 years and older):

3.3 A regulated member must administer the sedative dose in the dental office, taking into account any pre-arrival medications (e.g., cannabis, alcohol, narcotics, prescriptions, pre-arrival anxiolytics, etc.). **The regulated member or a sedation team member must be in continuous attendance and direct observation with the patient to observe level of sedation once the medication is given.** A regulated member or a sedation team member must be in continuous attendance until the recovery phase commences.

The interpretation of this new wording suggests that the dentist no longer needs to be directly supervising the client under oral sedation during the intra-operative phase.

As a result of this change in the Sedation Standards, the following question is being asked:

Can a registered dental hygienist provide treatment to clients under sedation if the dentist is not present in the operatory?

CRDHA is currently seeking expert and legal advice to assist in developing guidance to answer this question to address client safety and meet the Practice Standards and Code of Ethics of the profession.

While the College is investigating this issue, an RDH considering providing treatment to clients under oral sedation (over 12 years of age) must work within their own level of competency (refer to Practice Standards: Professional Responsibilities). **Dental hygienists are responsible for their own practice and do not work under supervision.** If a complaint were to be filed against an RDH who was providing care to a client under oral sedation, the RDH would be responsible for presenting evidence or justification for how they determined themselves to be competent to safely treat the client.

Some questions that might help to determine level of competency for this include:

1. Do you have the training, knowledge, skills, and judgement to recognize and respond to:
 - a. An adverse medical event for a client under sedation? (Practice Standard 1.19)

- b. A client progressing into a deeper level of sedation than intended? (Practice Standard 1.19)
2. Do you know the emergency protocols for clients under sedation? (Practice Standard 1.20.1)
3. If there is an unforeseen incident, what would you do? (Practice Standard 1.19)
 - a. What is the reversal drug for the oral sedative?
 - b. How is it administered?
 - c. Do you have the ability to administer the reversal drug if necessary?
4. Will the client be able to provide you with informed consent for dental hygiene treatment? (Practice Standard 1.7, 2.1, 2.19)
5. Is there someone who is appropriately trained that will be continuously monitoring the client that is sedated? (Practice Standard 2.3, 2.5, 2.9)

If you have answered “no” to any or all of the questions above, you would not be working within your level of competency and the CRDHA highly recommends that you do not provide services to clients that are under oral sedation. You may wish to consider alternative treatment strategies for these clients to meet their oral health needs.

CRDHA will provide more guidance on this issue as it becomes available.