

October 2, 2024

Dear Colleagues and Members of the Healthcare Community,

At the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA®), we are committed to advancing the profession of dental hygiene through **education, advocacy** and **professional autonomy** while supporting expanded roles that increase access to care. As the science of oral health and systemic health continues to evolve, so do the opportunities for dental hygienists to contribute meaningfully to comprehensive care. One such area of growth is Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy (OMT).

We recognize the increasing interest in OMT as a modality that dental hygienists can offer after completing advanced education. With foundational knowledge and additional specialized training, dental hygienists are uniquely positioned and qualified to perform this therapy, bridging oral health with overall health and well-being, and offering a valuable service to patients.

Since 2020, the ADHA has maintained a clear and supportive policy on OMT:

The American Dental Hygienists' Association acknowledges and supports registered dental hygienists who are educated in Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy (OMT). The dental hygienist educated in OMT may provide orofacial myofunctional assessments and treatment independently in a variety of practice settings and for patients of all ages.

We are aware, that unfortunately misinformation is being circulated by some organizations regarding the education, practice and qualifications of dental hygienists performing myofunctional therapy. These inaccuracies not only undermine the critical role of dental hygienists but risk causing confusion within the healthcare community and among the public. We offer the following clarifications:

1. Comprehensive Education and Training:

Dental hygienists in the United States are classified as Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners placing them in the same category alongside dentists under the Standard Occupational Classification system used by key federal agencies, including, but not limited to, the Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor. Dental hygienists are healthcare professionals that undergo rigorous foundational training in anatomy and physiology, pharmacology, pathology, medical emergencies, public health, craniofacial development, histology and embryology, direct patient care and much more. Through accredited dental hygiene programs, hygienists develop an in-depth understanding of the orofacial region. With additional advanced education in orofacial myofunctional therapy, dental hygienists can provide OMT therapy safely and effectively in a wide variety of settings.

2. Unique Qualifications:

The preventive care expertise and specialized education of dental hygienists make them particularly qualified to assess and address orofacial dysfunctions. Dental hygienists already assess critical factors like craniofacial growth and development, nutrition, airway issues, oral habits, dental arch morphology, oral pathology, behavioral change and many related conditions that OMT seeks to correct.

3. Collaborative Patient Care:

Dental hygienists are essential members of the healthcare team. As OMT providers, they work in collaboration with dentists, physicians, speech therapists, orthodontists, specialists and other healthcare professionals to ensure comprehensive patient care. This collaborative model enhances patient outcomes and contributes to the highest quality of care for individuals experiencing orofacial dysfunctions.

4. Advancing the Role of Dental Hygienists:

The ADHA advocates for expanded roles for dental hygienists, particularly in areas that align with the profession's core focus on prevention, early intervention, patient education and improved access to care. OMT is one such emerging area, and dental hygienists are well positioned to lead and excel in this field.

As the healthcare landscape embraces emerging therapies like OMT, it is crucial to recognize the unique and essential role dental hygienists play in providing this therapy. Their contributions have the potential to transform patient health by addressing orofacial dysfunctions that impact overall well-being.

We urge all healthcare organizations, professionals, and regulatory bodies to acknowledge the vital role of dental hygienists in performing OMT across a wide range of settings. The ADHA does support standardization of education and training for OMT and looks forward to actively participating in these important discussions.

Sincerely,



Erin Haley-Hitz
RDH, BSDH, MS, FADHA, MAADH
ADHA President 2024-2025



Lancette VanGuilder
BS, RDH, PHEDH, CEAS, FADHA
ADHA President-Elect 2024-2025