

Lesson Plan #1

Course: DNH 230 - Office Practice and Ethics

Topic: Society and the State Practice Act

Audience: Adult Learners (Senior Level Dental Hygiene Students)

Time: 50 minutes total

- Anticipatory set= 5 minutes
- Lesson content= 40 minutes
- Summary= 5 minutes

Materials: Computer, PowerPoint slides, Zoom, Projection Screens

Instructional Objectives:

Upon completion of the lesson, the student should be able to:

1. Identify the purpose and primary components of a State Dental Practice Act.
2. Explain the role of state government and state dental boards in regulating dental hygiene practice.
3. Describe statutory provisions related to licensure, scope of practice, supervision, and continuing education.
4. Differentiate among direct, indirect, and general supervision in dental hygiene practice.
5. Apply state practice act regulations to clinical and public-health scenarios.

References:

American Dental Hygienists' Association. (2026). Dental hygiene practice and regulation.

<https://www.adha.org>

Commission on Dental Accreditation. (2024). Standards for dental hygiene education programs.

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Minihan-Anderson, K. (2023). Ethics and law in dental hygiene (4th ed.). Elsevier.

Virginia Department of Health Professions, Board of Dentistry. (2025). Laws and regulations.

<https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/Boards/Dentistry/>

Wilkins, E. M., Wyche, C. J., & Boyd, L. D. (2024). Clinical practice of the dental hygienist (13th ed.).

Wolters Kluwer.

Lesson Content	Media – Notes – Questions & Answers
<p>I. Anticipatory Set</p> <p>A. <u>Introduction</u></p> <p>Understanding the dental practice act is not optional; it is a professional responsibility that protects both the patient and the provider.</p> <p>Dental hygienists practice within state-regulated legal frameworks designed to protect the public and maintain professional standards.</p> <p>B. <u>Gain Attention/Motivation</u></p> <p>The Virginia Board of Dentistry does not publish an annual count by violation type. Instead, it publishes individual case decisions.</p> <p>From those records and board reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A 2024–2025 board report shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 135 cases opened ○ 154 cases closed ○ 11 cases with violations <p>Do you know what the consequences of practicing outside legal scope is?</p> <p>Possible consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disciplinary action by the State Board of Dentistry ● Legal consequences, ● Loss of employment, ● Financial penalties ● Harm to patients ● Damage to professional reputation ● Ethical violations 	<p>PPT Slide #1 – Society and the State Dental Practice Act</p> <p>Q: Who is ultimately protected by the Dental Practice Act?</p> <p>A: The public is ultimately protected by the Dental Practice Act</p>

Whose responsibility is it for knowing and following state law?

C. Activate Prior Knowledge

What have you already seen a hygienist NOT allowed to do?

Quick poll: Can a hygienist diagnose? What does 'scope of practice' mean to you?"

D. Establish Rationale

Understanding dental laws prevents legal risk, improves patient safety, and supports professional autonomy.

E. Lesson Objectives

Upon completion of the lesson, the student should be able to:

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2. Explain the role of state government and state dental boards in regulating dental hygiene practice.
3. Describe statutory provisions related to licensure, scope of practice, supervision, and continuing education.
4. Differentiate among direct, indirect, and general supervision in dental hygiene practice.
5. Apply state practice act regulations to clinical And public-health scenarios.

PPT Slide #2 – Learning Objectives

Lesson Content

Media – Notes – Questions & Answers

I. State in Healthcare Regulation

A. Role of the State in Healthcare Regulation

States—not the federal government—regulate dental hygiene. Their job is public protection and quality assurance. That's why every state has its own Dental Practice Act. As hygienists, we're responsible for knowing the laws in the state where we practice.

- Constitutional basis - The U.S. Constitution grants states the power to regulate healthcare
- Public protection - States aim to safeguard the public's health and safety.
- Quality assurance - State regulation ensures high-quality healthcare for all citizens

B. State Dental Boards

Functions include:

- Licensure - Licensing dental professionals to practice in the state.
- Practice regulation - Disciplinary actions against dental professionals who violate regulations.
- Ongoing regulation - Ongoing regulation of dental practices, ensuring compliance with standards

Each state's dental board licenses professionals, handles disciplinary actions, and monitors standards. They interpret and enforce the Dental Practice Act. Essentially, they ensure the public receives competent, ethical care.

C. Dental Practice Acts

- State-specific statutory laws - Dental practice acts vary from state to state.
- Define legal scope of practice - These acts define the legal boundaries for dental hygienists.
- Establish regulatory framework - They establish a

PPT #3 - Role of the State In Healthcare Regulation

Q: Why do states regulate dental practice rather than the federal government?

A: Answers will vary. Here are some possible answers:

1. To ensure providers are properly trained and competent
2. To protect patients from unsafe or unethical practices
3. Because oral health is directly connected to overall health
4. To maintain consistent standards of care across the profession
5. To reduce risks such as infection, injury, or misdiagnosis
6. To provide a system of accountability
7. To promote public trust in dental professionals

PPT #4 – State Dental Boards: Key Functions

Note:

Explain licensure, regulation, and disciplinary authority.

PPT Slide #5 – Dental Practice Acts

Discuss state-specific laws and scope of practice.

comprehensive framework for practice.

The Dental Practice Act is essentially the rulebook for practicing dental hygiene in each state. It outlines exactly what services a hygienist is legally allowed to perform; this is what we call the scope of practice. It also explains the supervision requirements, meaning when a dentist needs to be present and when a hygienist can work independently under written orders. Beyond that, the Practice Act sets the standards for who can become a hygienist in the first place, things like education from a CODA-accredited program, passing board exams, and meeting licensure requirements. It also describes how the state handles disciplinary actions if a hygienist violates laws, works outside the legal scope, or practices unsafely. Because these laws are written at the state level, they're not the same everywhere. So your responsibilities, your permitted procedures, and even how independently you can work will change depending on the state you choose to practice in. Understanding your state's Dental Practice Act is one of the most important parts of staying compliant, protecting your license, and keeping patients safe.

II. Statutory Provisions Governing Dental Hygiene Practice

A. Nine Provisions in State Statutory Law for Dental Hygiene Practice

State dental practice acts typically include nine provisions that govern the practice of dental hygiene. These provisions are designed to ensure that dental hygienists are qualified, competent, and ethical.

This slide introduces the nine major provisions that appear in most State Dental Practice Acts. These provisions create the legal framework that controls how dental hygienists are trained, licensed, supervised, and held accountable. Together, they help ensure that only qualified, competent professionals provide dental hygiene services.

PPT Slides # 6 - Nine Provisions in State Statutory Law for Dental Hygiene Practice

<p>B. State Statutory Law Provisions Legislative Branch of Government responsible for enactment of State Dental Practice Act:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Licensure requirements 2. Educational approval 3. Examinations 4. Scope of practice 5. Supervision 6. Continuing education 7. Discipline 8. Licensure by endorsement 9. Eligibility <p>These are the nine common areas regulated by state law: licensure requirements, educational program approval, exam requirements, scope of practice, supervision rules, continuing education, disciplinary authority, licensure by endorsement, and eligibility criteria. Each provision provides structure and consistency to the profession while prioritizing public safety.</p>	<p>PPT Slides # 7 - State Statutory Law Provisions</p>
<p>C. 1-3: Licensing, Education, and Examination</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dental hygienists must meet specific licensing requirements to practice. 2. They must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene program 3. Licensing requires passing a state-administered examination. <p>Provisions one through three focus on what it takes to enter the profession. Hygienists must graduate from a CODA-accredited program, meet their state's licensure requirements, and pass required national, regional, or state examinations. These standards ensure that everyone entering the field has the knowledge and clinical competence to provide safe patient care.</p>	<p>PPT Slides # 8 - Licensing, Education, and Examination</p>
<p>D. 4-6: Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Continuing Education</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Dental hygiene acts define the procedures hygienists can perform. 	<p>PPT Slides # 9 - 4-6: Scope of Practice, Supervision, and Continuing Education</p>

5. These acts establish different levels of supervision required for specific procedures.
6. Dental hygienists must complete continuing education to maintain their licenses.

Provisions four through six define what services a hygienist is legally allowed to perform, the level of dentist supervision required for each procedure, and the ongoing education needed to maintain licensure. The scope of practice can include preventive, therapeutic, diagnostic, and—depending on the state—expanded functions. Continuing education requirements help ensure hygienists stay current with best practices and standards.

E. 7-9: Disciplinary Actions, Ethical Standards, and Public Health

7. These acts outline grounds for disciplinary action against hygienists
8. Dental hygienists are expected to adhere to ethical principles and professional standards.
9. Dental practice acts promote public health through regulations and initiatives

Provisions seven through nine focus on how the state oversees and regulates dental hygienists. First, the Practice Act outlines the grounds for disciplinary action, which ensures the board can respond if a hygienist violates laws or standards of care. Next, licensure by endorsement allows hygienists who are licensed in one state to gain licensure in another state without retaking clinical exams, as long as they meet the state’s requirements. Finally, the eligibility requirements define the basic qualifications needed to apply for a dental hygiene license, such as completing an accredited program and passing required exams. Together, these provisions ensure that hygienists are qualified to practice, can move between states when appropriate, and are held accountable for maintaining professional standards

III. Reasons for License Revocation, Restriction, or Suspension

Dental hygienists can face license revocation, restriction, or suspension

PPT Slides # 10 - 7-9: Disciplinary Actions, Ethical Standards, and Public Health

PPT Slide #11 - Reasons for License Revocation, Restriction, or Suspension

for various reasons, which can be categorized as professional misconduct, personal conduct issues, and administrative violations

Now that we've talked about the legal provisions that guide our profession, this slide looks at what can happen when those rules aren't followed. Dental hygienists, like all licensed healthcare providers, are held to high standards of safety and professionalism. If we violate those standards, the state dental board has the authority to restrict, suspend, or even revoke a license. Common issues include failing to recognize or report abnormal findings, poor or incomplete documentation, and patient injuries related to unsafe practice or infection-control violations. Other serious violations include working outside your legal scope, practicing without a valid license, breaking confidentiality laws, or engaging in fraudulent billing. The overall message is simple: the Practice Act protects the public, and it also protects your license. Following laws, documenting thoroughly, and practicing within scope are essential to keeping patients safe and maintaining your professional standing.

A. Professional misconduct

Professional misconduct refers to behaviors that fall below the standards expected of a licensed dental hygienist. There are three main categories shown here.

1. Incompetent or negligent practice - this includes providing care that doesn't meet accepted standards, failing to recognize obvious problems, or performing
2. Fraudulent or dishonest behavior - This can include falsifying records, misleading patients, or intentionally Documenting something inaccurately.
3. Ethical Violations - such as breaching patient confidentiality, ignoring privacy laws, or behaving in a way that damages patient trust.

Any of these forms of misconduct can lead to disciplinary action by the dental board because they put patient safety and public trust at risk.

PPT Slide #12 - Professional Misconduct

Q: Falsifying a periodontal chart would fall under which category

- a. Incompetence/Negligence
- b. Fraud/Dishonesty
- c. Ethical Violations such as confidentiality breaches?

A: a. Fraud/Dishonesty

B. Personal conduct issues

1. Substance abuse
2. Criminal convictions
3. Mental or Physical impairment

Personal conduct issues focus on behaviors in a hygienist's personal life that can affect their ability to practice safely and Professionally.

1. Substance abuse is a major concern because it can impair judgment, coordination, and overall performance.
2. Criminal convictions, especially those related to violence, theft, or drug misuse—can call into question a hygienist's reliability and fitness to practice.
3. And finally, any mental or physical condition that prevents a hygienist from providing safe, competent care can also lead to restrictions or required evaluations.

These issues aren't about punishing someone's private life; they're about ensuring that every provider who treats patients is capable of doing so safely.

C. Administrative violations

1. Practicing dental hygiene without a valid license
2. Failure to maintain required records, such as patient charts
3. Non-compliance with continuing education Requirements.

Now that we've talked about personal conduct issues that can affect a hygienist's ability to practice safely, let's shift to a different category of violations, those that deal with administrative responsibilities rather than clinical behavior. Administrative violations are issues that occur when a hygienist does not meet the basic legal and regulatory requirements tied to their license.

PPT Slide #13 - Personal Conduct Issues

PPT Slide #14 - Administrative violations

1. The first—and most serious—is practicing dental hygiene without a valid license. This includes working with an expired license or before receiving official approval from the Board.
2. Another common issue is failing to maintain accurate and complete patient records. Patient charts are legal documents, and missing information or inconsistent documentation can create serious liability risks.
3. The third category is not meeting continuing education requirements. CE is required to keep your skills current and to maintain your license in good standing, so falling behind can result in fines, probation, or a lapse in licensure. While these violations may not involve patient injury, they still have significant consequences. They show that staying compliant with administrative rules is just as important as practicing safely in the operatory.

IV. Levels of Supervision

- A. Direct Supervision – Dentist present
- B. Indirect Supervision – Dentist on premises
- C. General Supervision – Dentist available remotely
- D. Unsupervised / Independent Practice – Limited settings

Dental practice acts outline different levels of supervision required for dental hygienists, ensuring that patients receive safe and competent care. This is important because dental hygiene procedures can vary in complexity and potential risks. This section explores the four primary levels of supervision.

A. Direct Supervision

Definition - Requires the dentist's presence and oversight during the entire procedure

Procedures - Procedures requiring direct supervision are typically those with a higher risk or complexity.

Dentist's role - The dentist must be physically present in the treatment room during the procedure.

PPT Slide #15 - Levels of Supervision in Dental Hygiene Practice

Q: Under Virginia law, how long is a written order valid?

A: In Virginia, a dentist's written order is valid for 10 months

PPT Slide #16 - Direct Supervision

Note: Explain supervision levels with Virginia-specific examples.

In Virginia, direct supervision means the dentist must be physically present in the facility and must examine the patient during the appointment while the delegated procedure is being performed. This level of supervision is required for certain procedures that carry a higher level of complexity or risk, such as administering nitrous oxide or local anesthesia, and performing scaling or root planing when sedation or anesthesia is used. The dentist's presence ensures immediate oversight and supports patient safety.

B. Indirect Supervision

Definition - Requires the dentist's availability on the premises for consultation if needed.

Dentist's role - The dentist doesn't need to be physically present in the treatment room.

Procedures under indirect supervision can vary by state laws.

Under indirect supervision in Virginia, the dentist must be in the facility and must examine the patient at some point during the appointment. However, the dentist does not need to be in the treatment room during the procedure. This level of supervision applies to duties like scaling, root planing, gingival curettage, and certain preliminary examinations when sedation or anesthesia is not being used. The key point is that the dentist is on-site and available for consultation while the hygienist performs the delegated procedures.

C. General Supervision

Definition - The dentist is available for consultation via phone or other communication

Dentist's role - The dentist must have diagnosed the patient and created a treatment plan.

What this means for the Hygienist - Hygienists have a broader scope of practice under general supervision.

General supervision in Virginia allows a dental hygienist to provide certain services without the dentist

PPT Slide #17 - Indirect Supervision

PPT Slide #18 - General Supervision

being present, as long as the dentist has already completed a periodic exam and written a treatment order. This order is valid for up to 10 months. Before the appointment, the patient must be informed that the dentist may not be present, and only topical anesthetics may be used for pain control. Emergency protocols must be in place, and the hygienist must be able to carry them out.

General supervision provides the most flexibility in private practice settings while still requiring the dentist's ongoing oversight.

D. Remote Supervision and Unsupervised Practice

1. Public Health Settings - Dental hygienists may practice independently in certain public health settings
2. Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner

Virginia does not permit unsupervised private-practice hygiene, but it does allow remote supervision in public health settings. Under remote supervision, the dentist is available for communication and consultation but does not need to have completed an initial exam and does not need to be onsite. This model applies to public health dental hygienists working in places like schools, long-term care facilities, and community health programs. Remote supervision is designed to increase access to care while ensuring that the hygienist still operates within a defined legal framework.

V. Dental Hygienist Responsibilities

Dental hygienists have a critical role in ensuring patient safety and well-being. This responsibility encompasses understanding and adhering to state dental practice acts and regulations.

- Know and follow state laws
- Practice within scope
- Maintain ethical standards
- Advocate for patient safety

PPT Slide #19 - Unsupervised Practice

PPT Slide #20 - Dental Hygienist Responsibilities

Now that we've discussed supervision levels and how they determine how dental hygienists can practice in Virginia, this slide shifts our focus to the professional responsibilities that apply no matter what supervision level you're working under.

As licensed healthcare providers, dental hygienists have a critical responsibility to protect patient safety and promote overall well-being. This means we must understand and follow all parts of the Virginia Dental Practice Act, the regulations set by the Board of Dentistry, and the broader state laws that impact patient care.

These responsibilities include staying within your legal scope of practice, following supervision requirements, maintaining accurate and complete patient records, protecting patient confidentiality, and meeting all continuing education and renewal obligations. Hygienists must also be prepared to identify and report abuse when required by law, follow infection-control standards, and uphold ethical and professional behavior in every patient interaction. The main point here is that your license is not just permission to practice, it is a commitment to practicing safely, ethically, and in full compliance with state regulations. Understanding these responsibilities helps protect your patients, protects your license, and strengthens the trust that the public places in the profession of dental hygiene.

A. Understanding State Laws and Regulations

- Graph
- Categories of Tasks

This chart gives us a nationwide snapshot of what dental hygienists are legally allowed to do in each state. Every colored ring represents a different task, things like local anesthesia, supervision levels, prescriptive authority, Medicaid reimbursement, or providing sealants or prophylaxis in public health settings.

What's important here is that there is *no single, national scope of practice*. Each state decides what hygienists can and cannot do, and you can see how dramatically those permissions vary across the country. Research also shows

Note: Discuss legal, ethical, and professional accountability.

PPT Slide #21 and #22 - Understanding State Laws and Regulations

that states with broader scopes of practice tend to see better oral health outcomes in their populations. So, this slide helps you visualize how your legal responsibilities shift depending on where you practice.

VI. Issues That May Be Regulated by State Laws, but May Not Be Specifically Incorporated into the State Dental Practice Act

- Abuse reporting requirements
- Biomedical waste and hazards management
- Business operation practices
- Consent to treatment and informed consent
- Criminal activity
- Disability accommodation protections
- Education and training requirements
- False health care claims
- Liability for volunteer services
- Malpractice or actions resulting from healthcare injuries
- Mandatory malpractice insurance
- Patient confidentiality and heightened Protections
- Public health reporting requirements

Not all laws that affect daily dental hygiene practice are found directly in the State Dental Practice Act. However, these laws still create legal and professional obligations that dental hygienists must follow.

Additional state laws regulate responsibilities such as: Mandatory abuse reporting (e.g., child, elder, or dependent adult abuse)

- Biomedical waste handling and hazardous materials management
- Business and practice regulations, including advertising and billing
- Informed consent and patient rights
- Criminal activity requirements, including background checks
- Disability accommodations
- Required trainings, such as bloodborne pathogens education

PPT Slide #23 and #24- Issues That May Be Regulated by State Laws, but May Not Be Specifically Incorporated into the State Dental Practice Act

Note:

Discuss abuse reporting, confidentiality, informed consent, and public health reporting.

Other legal obligations outside the Dental Practice Act include:

- False healthcare claims and fraud prevention
- Professional liability, including malpractice laws and insurance requirements
- Legal protections and responsibilities related to volunteer services
- Heightened confidentiality rules for sensitive conditions (e.g., mental health, sexually transmitted diseases)
- Mandatory public health reporting of infectious or communicable diseases

Summary and Lesson Closure

By understanding and following state dental practice acts, dental hygienists can contribute to the advancement of the profession while ensuring patient safety and ethical practice. This balance between professional growth and regulatory compliance is essential for maintaining a strong dental hygiene profession.

The practice act exists to balance your professional growth with public safety. Understanding it helps you practice safely, ethically, and confidently

Note: Key teaching point:

A dental hygienist's professional responsibility extends beyond clinical duties and the Dental Practice Act alone. Compliance with multiple areas of state law is essential to ensure patient safety, ethical practice, and lawful participation in the healthcare system.

PPT Slide #25 - Conclusion: Balancing Professional Growth and Regulatory Compliance

Note: Summarize major points, review objectives, and answer questions.

Evaluation:

Student understanding will be evaluated through verbal responses, class discussion, and examination items aligned with the lesson objectives.

Test Items

Objective #1: Identify the purpose and key components of a State Dental Practice Act.

Test Item #1: Which of the following best describes the primary purpose of a State Dental Practice Act?

- A. To protect dental professionals from liability
- B. To regulate dental insurance reimbursement
- C. To protect the public by ensuring safe, competent dental care
- D. To establish federal standards for dental practice

Objective #2: Explain the role of state government and dental boards in regulating dental hygiene practice.

Test Item #2: Which entity is primarily responsible for licensing dental hygienists, enforcing regulations, and disciplining violations of dental practice laws?

- A. The American Dental Association
- B. The State Dental Board
- C. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- D. The Commission on Dental Accreditation

Objective #3: Describe statutory provisions related to licensure, scope of practice, supervision, and continuing education.

Test Item #3: Which of the following is typically defined within a state dental practice act?

- A. Office-specific employer policies
- B. Federal OSHA standards
- C. Insurance carrier reimbursement rules
- D. Dental hygiene scope of practice and supervision requirements

Objective #4: Differentiate among levels of supervision for dental hygienists.

Test Item #4: Explain how direct, indirect, and general supervision differ, and discuss how these differences impact a dental hygienist's autonomy and responsibility in patient care.

Objective #5: Recognize behaviors and violations that may result in disciplinary action.

Test Item #5: Why do you think administrative violations (such as failure to complete continuing education) are taken seriously by state dental boards, even when patient harm has not occurred?

Objective #6: Apply statutory regulations to clinical and public health scenarios.

Test Item #6: A dental hygienist is asked by an employer to perform a procedure they believe may be outside their legal scope of practice. How should the hygienist respond, and what legal and ethical principles guide that decision?

Correct Answer Key:

1. C
2. B
3. D
4. Direct, indirect, and general supervision differ primarily in the level of dentist presence and oversight. Under direct supervision, the dentist must be physically present in the operatory and authorize procedures before dismissal of the patient, limiting autonomy but increasing immediate oversight. Indirect supervision requires the dentist to be on the premises but not necessarily in the treatment room, allowing increased independence while maintaining availability. General supervision allows the dentist to authorize care through a written order and be available for consultation remotely, granting the hygienist the highest level of autonomy. As supervision levels decrease, the hygienist's responsibility for clinical judgment, legal compliance, and patient safety increases
5. Administrative violations are taken seriously because they demonstrate a failure to meet professional and legal responsibilities required for safe practice. Even when direct patient harm has not occurred, issues such as not completing continuing education, practicing with an expired license, or inadequate recordkeeping undermine public trust and regulatory oversight. These violations indicate potential risk to patients and show disregard for laws designed to ensure ongoing competency. State dental boards prioritize prevention, not just punishment after harm occurs, which is why administrative violations can still result in disciplinary action.
6. If a dental hygienist is asked to perform a procedure that may be outside their legal scope of practice, they should decline to perform the procedure and seek clarification by

consulting the state dental practice act or contacting the supervising dentist for guidance. The hygienist should explain that they are legally responsible for practicing within their authorized scope, even if directed otherwise by an employer. Ethical principles of patient safety, legal accountability, and professional integrity guide this decision. Performing procedures outside the scope of practice could result in disciplinary action, legal liability, and harm to patients, making refusal the appropriate professional response.