



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

MEDIA RELEASE

Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President

4 June 2009

ADA fears for patient safety if dental therapists treat adults.

The Australian Dental Association Inc. (ADA) fears that the South Australian Government's plan to allow dental therapists to treat adults, against expert advice, poses a risk to patient safety and to their long term dental health.

The ADA insists that removing the limitation that these practitioners only treat children from current Regulations dramatically alters the scope of practice for dental therapists by allowing them to perform treatment that is beyond their expertise and so poses a danger to the public. Dental therapists are just not trained or qualified for these duties and should not perform them.

Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President of the ADA said, "The scope of practice of dental therapists should remain, in accordance with their training, namely that part of dentistry which is required for the prevention of dental diseases and control of dental caries in school children."

Dr Hewson, said, "It is unacceptable and irresponsible and shows a complete lack of appreciation of what is entailed in diagnosis, dental care and treatment. Currently, the limited training and restricted range of knowledge and skills of dental therapists means that they do not have the formal education, training, appropriate competence or skills to treat older patients. Problems confronting adults are more complex, with every case being different and it is the recognition of a problem that is crucial to determine the proper treatment. Also the ability to continue the treatment if it becomes more complex is essential. Adelaide and Melbourne Universities have both identified the need for these practitioners to undergo essential extensive training before they can perform treatment on adults but there is no requirement for this associated with this Plan.

The ADA is further concerned that the dental therapist proposal does not address how taking therapists away from their primary focus of treating children and shifting them to the adult population will affect child oral health care delivery. Who will now fill this void? The most recent data available from the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health shows an increase in caries experience in 6 and 12-year old children from 1998 to 2002. If this trend continues, then removing dental therapist services from children to adults will only worsen child oral health.

Also the ADA rejects the spin in the Premier's media release where he states "*These changes follow a year's consultation with, among others, the Australian Dental Association, the Dental Board and the Dental School at the University of Adelaide*" who have all argued against the lifting of the age limit and "*The changes will also mean savings for people who see private dentists who employ dental therapists, as the services of a therapist are often a less expensive option for basic dental care*" which has absolutely no basis of fact . **The SA Government is putting patients at risk by ignoring this expert advice.**

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The Australian Dental Association Inc. (ADA) is the peak national professional body representing about 10,000 registered dentists engaged in clinical practice. ADA members work in both the public and private sectors.

The primary objectives of the ADA are to encourage the improvement of the health of the public and to promote the art and science of dentistry.