



## From Saw Teeth to Real Teeth: Taking a Look at Dentists' Continuing Education

Forestry and dentistry are very different professions in many ways. However, we wanted to provide an example of another self-regulated profession's continuing education program. The College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia was kind enough to explain how dentists and certified dental assistants stay up-to-date with evolving dental practice.

**WHILE THE NEED TO MAINTAIN COMPETENCE** remains constant, the way in which professionals are accomplishing this is changing. Self-regulating professions in Canada, the US and Europe are recognizing the importance of linking professional development activities to improved practice and better outcomes.

The College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia (CDSBC) regulates dentists and certified dental assistants (CDAs) in the public interest. Through the College, the dental profession is accountable for the quality of dental care that is provided in BC. Over 3,100 dentists and more than 6,000 CDAs are registered with the CDSBC.

The acceleration of scientific and technological progress in today's world reinforces the need for ongoing learning over the span of an individual's professional career. To renew their registration and certification each year, dentists and CDAs must meet mandatory continuing education (CE) requirements, which are established by the College's Quality Assurance Committee. The CE requirements are based on a three-year cycle, with dentists needing a minimum of 90 credits over three years, and CDAs needing 36.

Continuing education credits can be obtained in a number of categories and through various learning modalities (e.g. courses, conferences, teaching, publication authorship). To be eligible for credit, CE activities must meet the objective of the Quality Assurance (QA) program.

The Quality Assurance Program's objective is "...to promote competence and professionalism at all stages of dentists' and CDAs' careers. It is expected that activities undertaken within the Quality Assurance Program will have significant intellectual and/or practical content related to the practice of dentistry and/or the

management of the dental practice. Activities can also be related to the professional responsibilities or ethical obligations of the participant."

The Quality Assurance Program is led by a volunteer committee of dentists, certified dental assistants and members of the public. Staff provide management-level advice and administrative support. A CE subcommittee meets regularly to review activities that have been submitted for CE credit, but do not appear to meet the objective of the Quality Assurance Program. Ultimately, the subcommittee is interested in knowing how the course or activity contributed to making the dentist or CDA a better practitioner.

Dentists and CDAs are urged to consider the following core principles of the CDSBC's Quality Assurance Program when they are planning for continuing education activities.

- It is the responsibility of every dentist and CDA to maintain his or her own competence to practice.
- The incorporation of self-reflection and self-assessment into day-to-day practice are important components of this responsibility.
- Practice improvement and professional growth are the ultimate goals of continuing education within the CDSBC's Quality Assurance program.
- Dentists and CDAs are encouraged to link learning activities and professional development to their individual practices as a means of enhancing competence.

The Standards of Practice for Dentists and CDAs is a core document that should be used for self-assessment by dentists and CDAs. Examples of other documents include the Code of Ethics, Dental Records Management and the Clinical Practice Guideline for the Early Detection of Oral Cancer in British Columbia.

In addition to meeting CE requirements, dentists and CDAs must also meet a condition for continuous practice. This means that in order to work in BC, they must maintain current practice in dentistry through clinical practice, or work in teaching or research. Dentists need 900 hours of continuous practice over three years while CDAs need 600 hours.

CDSBC is also in the process of updating its approach to Quality Assurance by enabling dentists and CDAs to play a more active role in being accountable for identifying their individual learning needs and then finding ways to meet them.

The revised Quality Assurance Program will include already-established modalities but also more flexible approaches to meet learning needs. One of these approaches is focused on creating a framework for dentists and CDAs to capture the process of learning from their personal experiences of solving problems in their daily practice.

The subject of quality assurance in healthcare continues to evolve as more research becomes available about how professionals can use self-reflection and other techniques to support lifelong learning and maintain competence at all stages of their careers.

More information about the CDSBC's Quality Assurance Program can be found on the College website at [cdsbc.org](http://cdsbc.org) under the 'CE and Quality Assurance' tab. 🐾

*The College of Dental Surgeons of BC assures British Columbians of professional standards of oral health care, ethics and competence by regulating dentistry in a fair and reasonable manner. Our regulatory mandate as a self-governing profession stems from the Health Professions Act and the Bylaws made under the Act.*