

# **Letter: We need oral health practitioners**

**Colleen Clark, Red Wing, The Republican Eagle  
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To the Editor:

I thank Robert Tjossen (R-E, April 71) for raising awareness of the Oral Health Practitioner legislation, which is currently pending in Minnesota.

The legislation was created from a work group convened by the Minnesota Department of Health to address what the U.S Surgeon General describes dental and oral health diseases as the “silent epidemic” that burdens disproportionate groups and calls for state and national efforts to improve oral health among all Americans.

The oral health practitioner is modeled after the scope of services provided by nurse practitioners and physician assistants who are educated and trained to administer a predetermined set of services without direct supervision and are now a well accepted part of the health care team. No direct oversight is necessary because they have achieved the level of training and testing for licensure required to provide these services in a professional, legal and ethically responsible manner.

Although concerns were initially raised about the safety of such advanced practice, these professionals have become an integral part of the health care system, providing services to a growing number of patients in a variety of settings with the ability to keep costs lower. For many of us they have become our preferred primary health care provider.

The proposed legislation for establishing an oral health practitioner also requires advanced education, testing, and licensure to assure professional, legal and ethical provision of services. There is currently a growing shortage of dentists.

Requiring supervision as Dr. Tjossen suggests, will not provide the possibility of increasing the number of individuals served for less health care dollars expended.

Currently 28 states as well as numerous countries support the use of advanced dental practitioners to provide a defined set of care that improves access to quality preventive, early detection and treatment of dental problems.

Please contact your legislators and ask them to support legislation to address access to quality dental care for those unserved in Minnesota.

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