

- SUBJECT:** Allowing a dental assistant to perform certain procedures
- COMMITTEE:** Public Health — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Delisi, Jackson, Cohen, Coleman, Gonzales, S. King, Olivo, Truitt  
0 nays  
1 absent — Laubenberg
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 26 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** (*On House companion bill, HB 1065 by Laubenberg:*)  
For — Danielle Delgadillo, Charlie Schnabel, and William Steinhauer, Texas Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; Kenneth Bolin; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Brad Shields, Texas Dental Hygienists' Association; Danny Watts, Texas Academy of Pediatric Dentistry)  
  
Against — None  
  
On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jim Zukowski, Texas State Board of Dental Examiners)
- BACKGROUND:** Under current law, certain dentists are permitted to delegate the application of a pit and a fissure sealant to a dental assistant. The dentist must either be a Medicaid provider or practice in an underserved area, as determined by the Texas Department of Health.  
  
The State Board of Dental Examiners issues a pit and fissure sealant certificate to a dental assistant who has at least two years of experience and has successfully completed at least 16 hours of education in pit and fissure sealants. The education must be completed through an accredited dental hygiene program or a dental assisting program.
- DIGEST:** SB 692 would add the act of coronal polishing to the pit and fissure sealants certificate. A licensed dentist could delegate the duties of coronal polishing and pit and fissure sealant application to a dental assistant

holding the certificate. The bill would change from 16 to 12 the number of hours of clinical and didactic education required in coronal polish and pit and fissure sealants in order to qualify for the certificate.

SB 1457 also would eliminate the current requirement that a dentist who delegated such duties be either a Medicaid provider or practice in an underserved area.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

By allowing dentists to delegate the duty of coronal polishing, SB 692 would enable dental practices to serve a greater number of patients, thereby increasing access to dental care. Dental assistants have proved successful in applying pit and fissure sealants in underserved areas or under the supervision of a Medicaid provider. As the state's population grows, more dental practitioners are needed to perform this duty. Dental practices also must function at a more efficient level. The bill would address these problems by allowing dental assistants throughout Texas to apply pit and fissure sealants and perform coronal polishing under the supervision of a delegating dentist.

The bill primarily would affect pediatric dentistry, as the relevant procedures most often are performed on children. The pit and fissure sealant process involves sealing the cracked edges at the top of a tooth. Typically, children receive this procedure as a preventative measure against cavities. Coronal polishing includes the polishing of the front side of the tooth. By increasing access to such procedures, the bill would help to improve the dental health of Texas' children. Dental assistants actually may possess a greater understanding than dentists of the procedures under discussion, according to a recent study. They also may be more capable of handling the pediatric population.

The delegation of certain duties to dental assistants would decrease the stress level of dentists, allowing them to focus on performing more complicated tasks. Under the bill, dental assistants still would be held to certain standards under the certification process. To ensure the excellence of the relevant procedures, Texas State Board of Dental Examiners would oversee the certification process for pit and fissure sealant application and

coronal polishing. Given that the dentist would be liable for these duties, a dentist still could choose not to delegate.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Dental assistants do not receive the same rigorous education that licensed dentists receive. Permitting a dental assistant to perform the coronal polishing and the pit and fissure sealant could result in dissatisfied or poorly treated patients.

**NOTES:**

The companion bill, HB 1065 by Laubenberg, was reported favorably as substituted by the Public Health Committee on April 30 and recommended for the Local and Consent Calendars Committee.