

Dental specialty recognition requirements under study

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Are the ADA Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties clear enough?

The ADA will soon find out. In passing Resolution 48H-2011, the House of Delegates directed the ADA Council on Dental Education and Licensure to study the requirements and clarify their intent.

Res. 48H calls for CDEL to review the process with a focus on Requirement 1(a) of the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties and National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists.

At issue is whether the sponsoring organizations of recognized specialties like public health dentistry and oral and maxillofacial radiology (the American Association of Public Health Dentistry and the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology) meet Requirement 1(a), which states that—among other things—in order for an area to be recognized as a specialty, it must be represented by a sponsoring organization whose membership is reflective of the special area of dental practice.

In October, the ADA 8th Trustee District brought its concerns to the House regarding the AAPHD's practice of allowing a membership category that permits full membership and voting privileges to both dentists who are not public health specialists and nondentists. Some believe this raises the question of whether AAPHD's policies and statements are reflective of its specialty base.

“Some members are concerned that dental public health may not be meeting the spirit of the recognition requirements because the membership of AAPHD includes nondentists and nondental public health specialists,” said Dr. George Kinney Jr., chair of the Council on Dental Education and Licensure. “On the other hand, dental public health is unique among recognized specialties in that its focus is on treating/serving populations; not patients in dental offices.”

Of AAPHD members, only 41 percent are dental public health specialists, according to CDEL. The remaining 59 percent are either nonspecialty dentists or nondentists. Nearly all dental specialty groups have membership categories that may allow for non-U.S. specialists or others to be members in some affiliated capacity. However, the AAPHD is in a small minority of specialty organizations with regard to two aspects of its organizational practices: (1) the AAPHD allows nonspecialist and nondentist members to have voting privileges in its organization; and (2) it allows for nonspecialists and nondentists to be voting members on its governing board and serve

as officers in its organization. At the present time, Diane Brunson, a dental hygienist, is the organization's president.

Res. 48H calls for CDEL to review the criteria and process for the recognition of specialty sponsoring organizations with regard to Requirement 1(a) and consider interpreting the word "reflective" to mean that only specialist dentist members be able to vote and hold office. Any additional recommendations for change should be reported to the 2012 House of Delegates.

Dr. Kinney said that CDEL plans to discuss Res. 48H at its Nov. 10-11 meeting.