



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
PLASTIC SURGEONS®



THE PLASTIC SURGERY
FOUNDATION™

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ASPS ISSUE BRIEF

Dental Scope of Practice

Background

In 1997, the American Dental Association (ADA) approved a vague but significant change to the organization's definition of the practice of dentistry. According to the ADA, dentistry should now be defined as:

"The evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of the diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body."

Since 1997, the dental lobby has successfully been able to incorporate this change in many states. In states that have adopted this broad and ambiguous language in their dental practice law, dentists have been able to argue that the legal scope of their profession includes cosmetic surgical procedures, such as Botox blepharoplasty, rhytidectomy, rhinoplasty, otoplasty, liposuction and the use of injectables such as Botox. The procedures fall squarely within the practice of medicine.

While single degree dentists and oral surgeons (DDS or DMD) have extensive training in the area of oral health, their formal training does not include the level of education that plastic surgeons and physician-surgeons receive related to recognition and treatment of surgical complications. Although such complications are rare, when they do occur it is essential that extensive training and residency experience of a physician-surgeon is available to patients.

The Solution

Unfortunately, organized medicine has generally not been effective at countering the highly organized and motivated dental offensive. Each year, more state legislatures are considering legislation based on the ADA definition and more non-physician oral surgeons are able to perform the same medical procedures that plastic surgeons spend years in medical and surgical training to perform.

However, there is proof that a successful campaign against the dental profession's attempts to encroach into the practice of medicine is possible. The work of ASPS members in the state of New York was pivotal to the passage of legislation in 2001 which could serve as a model in other states. The language in the New York Law specifies that dentistry includes treatment, diagnosis, operating, prescribing, etc of the oral and "maxillofacial area related to restoring and maintaining dental health," thereby clarifying the state's legal definition of dentistry.

Additionally, in 2015, ASPS and organized medicine were able to successfully combat this definition in Washington state by attempting to negotiate language with the dental lobby at the beginning of the state's legislative session. During these negotiations, it became clear that physician oral surgeons and even some single degree dentists believe that this definition is far too broad, thus making them allies to the specialty in the fight to keep the status quo. ASPS and coalition partners were able to educate the legislature on these shared concerns, ultimately leading the legislature to not consider this legislation further during the session.