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8 Salmon Fields Business Village  
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Sir,

We write in response to the article, 'Can a hygienist work without a nurse?' written by Len D'Cruz and Reena Wadia.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that article attempts to allay the fears of practice owners and dental hygienists that working without dental nursing support is acceptable as there is no legal or regulatory necessity to do so. The authors quote: '*...the GDC envisages clinicians such as dentists, hygienists and therapists not working in isolation but with other members of the team who can assist primarily with a response to a medical emergency.*'

The authors acknowledge that, '*Clearly 'support' can be provided for administrative tasks, chaperonage and chairside assistance...*' and that GDC Standards for the Dental Team 6.2.2. clearly state: '*You should work with another appropriately trained member of the dental team at all times when treating patients in a dental setting.*' However, there are no further references to the remaining GDC standards which state:

The only circumstances in which this does not apply are when:

- Treating patients in an out of hours emergency
- There are exceptional circumstances – these are unavoidable circumstances which are not routine and could not be foreseen.

The authors, by their own admission, agree that these standards apply to dentists, dental hygienists and therapists. Therefore, there should be no distinction between any of these clinicians when this standard is applied.

A periodontal specialist treating a patient non-surgically would expect to have dental nursing support, however, for many years there has been an acceptance that dental hygienists can work alone without the support of a dental nurse. Now the authors are recommending a risk assessment to be carried out in these situations. A risk assessment cannot fully assess every patient that the dental hygienist treats but would give a general view of the risk associated with treatments delivered. BSDHT and BADT find this situation and justification for lone working unacceptable.

Furthermore, suggesting that as a referring dentist they should volunteer their own mouth to be the test bed of the skillset of the dental hygienist they wish to refer to and that, '*if nothing else you will end up with clean teeth and a greater empathy for all dental patients who see you and sometimes cough and splutter their way through treatment because you didn't give them chance to breathe or swallow or wince in pain when you are a bit heavy handed with the scaler*' is a patronising and demeaning statement which has no place in this article.

We acknowledge the authors do make the point that the ideal is to employ a full-time dental nurse to assist (we prefer the adjunctive 'support') the hygienist and that this should not be precluded due to financial considerations. There is also consideration to acknowledge the daily struggle a lone hygienist faces. The 'helpful' strategies imparted were predicated with, 'a hygienist that can do just that (working without assistance) would certainly be seen as an asset to any practice and valued professionally amongst the team'. This implies that a dental hygienist who works with dental nurse support will not be an asset or valued professionally.

The suggested strategies, whilst seeming to be written to help the dental hygienist work more smoothly through the day, still require valuable additional time for preparation, challenges with infection control, safe patient management and contemporaneous record keeping.

An important issue, not discussed in the article, is the stress that lone working places on dental hygienists. This is particularly pertinent to our newly-qualified colleagues who have had full support throughout training but are then expected to work in an environment without nursing support whilst trying to build confidence and competence in their chosen profession.

Despite one of the authors being a dento-legal advisor, our members report that their indemnity providers have advised it would be difficult to support them in any litigation brought against them because they did not have nursing support.

Following publication of this article, as you would expect, we have been inundated with reports of such difficulties from our members and non-members: all are concerned that this 'in depth' piece on 'regulation' gives further justification to their practice owners to refuse nursing support.

*BDJ in Practice's* strapline is 'This popular publication aims to inform and educate dentists and dental students about developments, trends and issues affecting dental practices in the UK'. The article was aimed at dental hygienists whilst being published for dentists. It begs the question: Why?

As clinicians we are not asking for anything different to what the dentist expects daily: simply parity among the clinical team.

BSDHT and BADT request an apology from the authors, acknowledging the concerns and strength of feeling their article has created among the dental hygiene and dental therapy professions. We would also like to write an article to be published in *BDJ in Practice* to redress the balance.

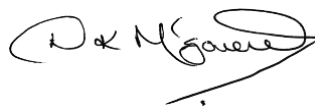
Yours sincerely,



**Julie Deverick**

**GDC Number: 3425**

President BSDHT



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**GDC Number: 113624**

President BADT

1. D'Cruz L, Wadia R. Can a hygienist work without a nurse? *BDJ In Practice* 2019; **32**: 14-15.



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Please see co-signatories to the letter below:

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