

# **Expansion and Redefinition of a Dental Hygienist's Role, from Medical Assistance to Human Services, as Examined from the Clinical Practices of Oral Health Care**

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## Abstract

This paper considers a new perspective for oral care, focusing on legislative changes regarding dental hygienists and on actual clinical practices of “oral care.”

The actual title of “dental hygienist” was created by law in 1948. Its role was restricted to medical procedures to prevent and remove dental tartar. This law later underwent two substantial amendments, one to add an auxiliary task regarding dental medical examinations, in 1955, and the other to add dental health guidance, in 1989. Thus, the three areas involving dental hygienists have been set as “prevention, assistance in medical examination, and dental health guidance.”

However, due to this role expansion, the role of a dental hygienist has become unclear. In addition, such expansion now includes home/on-site visitation to provide oral health care, since 1992. Extensive as it is, “oral health care” needs to draw on the knowledge and skills of other medical fields. Clients require continued and holistic care.

This paper calls for a redefinition of the role of dental hygienists as part of human services, as the current tasks they face encompass various roles in actual clinical practices at each site. This paper also explores one possible role of an "oral hygienist" regarding rendering personal support extending beyond dental care.