

Dental Hygiene Services and the Treatment of a Spouse

A Deceptively Complex Issue

Registrants will be aware that, under existing legislation in Ontario, dental hygienists are not permitted to treat their spouses. In the fall of 2013 the Ontario Government amended the *Regulated Health Professions Act* with respect to treatment of spouses by health care professionals. This amendment permits health regulatory colleges to develop a regulation that, if accepted by government, could permit members of that college to treat their spouses. Each college has a mandate to protect the public and will need to consider the potential implications such a change might have on the public.

Along with other regulatory colleges, the CDHO will be considering this issue in the near future. In its deliberations, Council will likely consider the following questions:

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- **What is the definition of sexual abuse in Ontario and how does it apply to the treatment of spouses of dental hygienists?**
 - **What is the definition for spouse?**
 - **Is this an issue of public safety? Is there evidence that a problem exists in dental hygiene?**
 - **If a regulation was passed that allowed registered dental hygienists to treat a spouse, what are the potential impacts on the public?**
 - **Is the risk to the public different depending on the respective scopes of practice for different regulated health professionals? What are the potential risks to the public from a dental hygiene perspective?**
 - **How should CDHO communicate with its registrants on this issue?**
 - **In the event that a regulation is passed, how would it be enforced?**
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