

FDI Policy Statement

The Role of Supervision in Dentistry



Key words:
Dental team
Access
Scope of practice

Context

Supervision of the dental team is a term often used to describe the working relationship of dentists and their team members, with the dentist observing and/or checking their colleagues' work. Within this understanding, supervision is interpreted in a variety of ways, from direct supervision (being in the same room and closely observing someone's work) to simply retaining overall responsibility for the work but with the team member working largely independently and with access to the dentist where necessary, often termed as *delegation but not substitution*. The nature and extent of supervision may vary depending on professional roles, experience levels and regulatory requirements. More fundamentally, supervision has an important role to play in the context of supporting and mentoring other members of the dental team, including dentists, and therefore represents an important part of their professional development. It can be used to improve the safety, quality and effectiveness of oral healthcare.

Supervision in the context of supporting a wider dental team should be regarded as a facilitator for equitable access to oral healthcare rather than a restrictive process. It strengthens team-based approaches, enhances professional education and fosters a deeper understanding of the various roles and responsibilities within the dental team, ultimately supporting the broader objectives of universal health coverage. Supervision (direct or indirect) works best when there are clear shared goals for the healthcare services to be provided or stated standards for the services being delegated.

Scope

Supervision in the context of supporting a wider dental team is appropriate for all members of the dental team. There are different forms of supervision, and some may be more appropriate than others depending on the nature of the proposed intervention. It need not be constant, but it should always be available. Supervision must adhere to local, regional and national legislation and regulation. The definition of the standards and scope of practice to which safe, satisfactory dentistry is delivered ultimately lies with regulators. In this Policy Statement we also describe how supervision can

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.identj.2025.104002>

0020-6539/© 2025 Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of FDI World Dental Federation. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

enhance access to oral healthcare in areas where it is limited or unavailable.

Definitions

Supervision is a structured process that supports both the safe delivery of patient care and the ongoing professional learning and development of dental team members. It enables individuals to reflect on and enhance their knowledge, skills and competence through agreed and regular support with other professionals.¹

The different forms of supervision are as follows:

- **General supervision:** the dentist has organised the procedure but does not need to be present; however, they maintain the responsibility for patient care.
- **Direct supervision:** the dentist is present throughout the treatment and may need to evaluate the patient before, during and after the procedure.
- **Indirect supervision:** the dentist must be on site and available during the procedure for consultation.
- **Remote supervision:** members of the dental team may perform certain tasks without direct or indirect supervision using video links, telehealth consultations or similar remote communication technologies.
- **Public health supervision:** dental services provided by licensed health professionals in community programmes with general oversight from a dentist who is not required to be on-site.

The role of audit in supervision

An audit is a valuable tool for reviewing and improving professional performance, patient safety and the quality of care. Regular audits help to ensure that supervision processes are effective and the highest standards of care are maintained. While an audit itself is not a direct form of supervision, it provides essential feedback that can guide supervisory practices and ongoing professional development.

Principles

Supervision plays a crucial role in developing an effective dental team, which in turn enhances quality of care and contributes to improving access to oral healthcare, particularly in areas where it is most needed. It should be recognised that it has different forms, and a considerate needs assessment should be performed to decide which form of supervision is appropriate for which situation. **Appropriate supervision should be used to enhance patient care and not to replace or bypass the dentist's clinical responsibilities.**

The responsibility for patient's safety and quality of care remains with the care provider irrespective of any supervision in place.

Policy

- All members of the dental team at any career stage should benefit from supervision. This includes those recently qualified or seeking to acquire new skills or qualifications, those returning to practice after a career break or a period of suspension, those performing new procedures for the first time and those migrating between countries.
- Having appropriate education, training, experience and a clearly defined scope of practice in place is an essential foundation for supervision, both for the supervising professional and the team member being supervised.
- All areas of performance should be supervised from time to time, including compliance-related aspects such as record keeping, continuous professional development, health and safety, and other regulatory requirements.
- A patient referral pathway must be in place, where possible, to ensure that members of the dental team can refer patients to an appropriately qualified colleague for advice or treatment when needed.

- All patients who have been managed under public health supervision or remote supervision by persons who are not dental professionals must have a referral pathway to a dental professional.
- Effective supervision with regular, constructive feedback to support professional development and maintain high standards of care should encourage strengths and positive practices. It also plays a role in identifying areas for improvement to ensure quality and patient safety.

Disclaimer

The information in this Policy Statement was based on the best scientific evidence available at the time. It may be interpreted to reflect prevailing cultural sensitivities and socio-economic constraints.

REFERENCE

1. UK Health and Care Professions Council. *Guidance on Supervision*. Available from: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/meeting-our-standards/supervision-leadership-and-culture/supervision/>. Accessed 6 October 2025.