

Media Statement

UNQUALIFIED YET EXPERIENCED DENTAL ASSISTANTS TO REGISTER

11 April 2017

For immediate release

Pretoria – In April 2005, the HPCSA opened the registration process to professionalise Dental Assistants. At the time, the regulations prescribed qualifications that would enable dental assistants to register. Those that did not register were thus not allowed to practise. The HPCSA as a statutory body is required to act in accordance with the establishing statute, namely the Health Professions Act No. 56 of 1974 which requires that Dental Assistants should register with the HPCSA if they are to practise.

The Minister of Health, through the recommendation of the HPCSA, amended the regulations. In 2008, Dental Assistants who were not registered with the HPCSA, but who had five years of experience practising as Dental Assistants prior to the amendment were allowed to practise under the *Grandfather Clause*. Effectively, this means that Dental Assistants who had no qualifications, but having practised for a minimum period of five years prior to May 2008 were given three months within which to register with the HPCSA.

In 2012, the HPCSA recognised that there were still a number of Dental Assistants practising without registration; despite the 2005 regulations and the 2008 amendment. Once again, the HPCSA recommended that unregistered practising Dental Assistants be afforded another opportunity to register with the HPCSA. The Minister of Health subsequently approved the recommendation. This time, unregistered practising Dental Assistants were given six months within which to apply for registration.

In March 2014, The North Gauteng High Court recommended that unregistered Dental Assistants not be subjected to criminal proceedings and the Dentists not be subjected to unprofessional conduct proceeding. This was to allow the Dental Assistants to obtain the necessary qualifications.

This judgement was challenged, and in November 2015, the Supreme Court of Appeal, confirmed the decision of the North Gauteng High Court that dental assistants have to be regulated in order to protect the public and dental assistants themselves.

The Professional Board for Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene is mindful of the various challenges facing dental assistants. With this in mind, the Professional Board for Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene submitted a recommendation to the Minister of Health that would allow for unqualified yet experienced dental assistants to register with the HPCSA. The condition of such registration would be that these dental assistants would have a period of six (6) months from the date of promulgation of such regulations in which to register, and a further proviso would be that they have a period of two (2) years from the date of their registration to successfully complete a Board examination. Candidates will be offered a defined number of opportunities at writing the Board examination, and these examinations will be offered in all provinces on numerous occasions. Failure to successfully complete the Board examination after the two-year post-registration period will see the dental assistant registered in this category being unable to renew their registration, and thus be unable to practise as a dental assistant in South Africa. On 07 April 2017, the Minister of Health promulgated these regulations, and the Board urges all eligible dental assistants to register with the HPCSA in terms of these provisions. The required application form and examination guidelines are available on the HPCSA website www.hpcsa.co.za.

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About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body established in terms of the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974. The HPCSA is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions and the mission of the HPCSA is quality and equitable healthcare for all.

Council is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to education, training and registration, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

In order to safeguard the public and indirectly the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions registrable with Council.

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