
Media Statement

DENTAL ASSISTANTS REGISTRATION

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For immediate release

Pretoria – Dental Assistants are valued and important healthcare professionals that work alongside dental specialists, dentists, dental therapists and oral hygienists in the treatment of patients, allowing for safe and effective oral healthcare delivery.

In order to render safe oral healthcare, there is a global trend and need to professionalisation of Dental Assistants. Based on this, the Dental Assistants Association of South Africa (DAASA) approached the Professional Board for Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene (PBDOH) in 1995, and after consultation with all stakeholders; including the South African Dental Association (SADA), the registration of dental assistants began in 2005.

The Professional Board for Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene (PBDOH) created two categories of registration, namely:

1. Registration which allowed experienced dental assistants (with 5 years or more experience) to gain entry into the register of dental assistants. This was termed the “Grandfather Clause” in May 2008 and this register was opened for three months. However, due to a limited response from a number of eligible dental assistants to register, the PBDOH reopened this register for a further period of six months.
2. The second category of registration that was allowed for experienced dental assistants was the Supplementary Dental Assistants register. This register allowed for those dental assistants who had less than 5 years’ experience to register in this category, and then write a Board exam, with the last exam being in 2016. This register has now also been closed. This clause excludes qualified Dental Assistants.

In 2014 and 2015, the South African Dental Association (SADA) unsuccessfully instituted legal action against the registration of Dental Assistants. 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 proceedings until 31 March 2016. This was to allow the Dental Assistants to obtain the necessary qualifications. This means that, the

aforementioned High Court had put a moratorium on the criminal prosecution of unregistered practicing Dental Assistants and the prosecution of Dentists for employing unregistered practicing Dental Assistants. The South African Dental Association appealed the judgement, 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.

In order to facilitate the registration of those dental assistants who, as a result of this moratorium, did not register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), the PBDOH is presently instituting measures that would enable unqualified yet experienced dental assistants to be provisionally registered for a period of two years, with the provision that within a period of two years they complete a Board examination. The Board will offer four examinations per annum over a period of two years, and candidates will be allowed three opportunities to undertake the examination. Successful completion of the Board examination will permit access to full registration, and not a qualification. Whilst being provisionally registered the dental assistant would need to comply with the continuous professional development (CPD) and annual fee payments as required for dental assistants.

The HPCSA will provide additional administrative support to facilitate the registration and examination processes. The registration period will be announced once the regulations have been promulgated by the Minister of Health. Further information will be made available on the HPCSA website.

Ends

About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body and is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality healthcare standards for all.

The Council is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to registration, education and training, 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 with which Council is concerned.

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