

Massachusetts Board of Registration in Dentistry
Advisory Ruling on Prescribing Authority of Limited License Dental Interns and Faculty

Title: Prescribing Authority of Limited License Dental Interns and Faculty

Authority:

The Massachusetts Board of Registration in Dentistry (“Board”) issues this Advisory Ruling on the prescribing authority of limited licensed dental interns pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, chapters 30A, § 8 and 112, § 43.

Date Issued: September 3, 2014

Scope of Practice: Dentistry by limited license dental interns and faculty

Purpose:

To advise the public of the Board’s position concerning the prescribing authority of limited license dental interns and faculty with the instant advisory ruling. The Board has reviewed the applicable provisions of M.G.L. c. 94C (a/k/a the Controlled Substance Act or “CSA”) as well as statutory provisions on limited dental registration and practice of dentistry at M.G.L. c. 112, §§45A and 50 to determine how the CSA applies to the scope of dental practice of limited license dental interns and faculty.

As set forth in the Board memorandum dated September 3, 2014, the CSA recognizes “practitioners,” who may issue prescriptions and administer controlled substances. The CSA defines “practitioners” to include “dentists,” but does not further define “dentists.” The CSA also recognizes classes of professionals who may administer controlled substances pursuant to the order of a practitioner; however, the CSA does not specifically recognize limited license dental interns as a special class.

M.G.L. c. 112, §45A, the statute authorizing the limited registration, uses the term “dental intern” when describing the qualifications for such registration, namely, that an applicant for limited registration have been “appointed a dental intern” (or alternatively, “employed as a member of faculty”). The statute further states that the limited registration “shall entitle the holder to practice dentistry” but “only in the hospital or other institution designated on his registration and under the direction of a registered dentist employed therein.”

Section 45A does not limit the holder of limited registration to engage in clinical practice as a “dental intern” as something distinct from dentistry, but rather, the dental intern status is an employment arrangement and prerequisite for limited registration. Thus, since the limited registration entitles the holder to *practice dentistry*, the Board finds support for the interpretation that limited registration dental interns are a subset of dentists authorized to practice dentistry within specified confines, rather than a separate type of professional engaging in a separate type of clinical practice.

Furthermore, the Board interprets the dental statutes to impose no restrictions on limited registration dental interns’ authority to prescribe. The practice of dentistry, as defined in §50, includes holding oneself “out as being able to diagnose, treat, operate or *prescribe* for any disease, pain, injury,

deficiency, deformity, or other condition of the human teeth, alveolar process, gums or jaws, or associated parts, intraorally or extraorally...” (emphasis supplied). Prescribing falls well within the practice of dentistry and nothing in §45A specifically limits prescriptive practice of dental interns or faculty. Thus, the Board reads the limited registration restrictions as conferring prescribing authority but with limitations as to location (prescribing for patients treated in the designated institution) and supervision (under the direction of a registered dentist). It remains the responsibility of the supervising dentist to set appropriate guidelines and to review the practice by the dental intern to determine the propriety of treatment rendered and medications prescribed. A limited license dental intern prescribing in a fashion that contravenes the supervising dentist’s direction would be subject to discipline by the Board.¹

The Board finds limited registration dental interns and faculty to be “dentists” with prescriptive authority, albeit subject to limitations as to location and supervision. Consistent with the CSA and dental statutes, the Board considers limited license dental interns and faculty to be “practitioners” within the meaning of CSA and thus authorized to obtain, possess, administer, dispense and prescribe under their own Massachusetts Controlled Substance Registration, much as any fully licensed dentist employed at the clinic would be.

Advisory Ruling:

The Board of Registration in Dentistry finds and advises that limited registration dental interns and faculty to be “dentists” with prescriptive authority, subject to limitations as to location and supervision set forth in Section 45A.

¹ The Board also notes the dental regulations require initial applicants for limited registration to provide documentation of successful completion of a minimum of three continuing education credits in “pharmacology, with emphasis on prescription writing.” *See* 234 CMR 4.05(5)(f).