

CLAIM	FACT
<p><i>A dental therapist could be a high school graduate, receiving only 3 years of training and would be authorized to do irreversible surgical extractions.</i></p>	<p>Dental therapists are formally trained to the same national standards as a dentist for the limited procedures they may perform, such as fillings and extractions of baby teeth. They must also pass the same state clinical licensing exam sitting next to dental candidates for the procedures they have in common then apply to the Florida Board of Dentistry for licensure.</p>
<p><i>Florida does not have a shortage of dentists. Florida has approximately 14,000 licensed dentists.</i></p>	<p>In Florida, roughly one in four residents, more than 5.5 million Floridians, live in areas designated by the federal government as having a shortage of dentists; and, 63 of Florida's 67 counties have at least one shortage area. Moreover, only about 18 percent of Florida dentists accept Medicaid, and, in 2017, about 60 percent of children on Medicaid, about 1.6 million children, did not see a dentist.</p>
<p><i>There are no Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) approved programs in the United States. The dental therapists practicing in Minnesota did not graduate from a CODA-approved program.</i></p>	<p>Since Minnesota was the first state to allow dentists to hire dental therapists, there were no CODA standards developed; instead, they were accredited by the state. Since then, the Minnesota schools have become the models for CODA, and will be applying for CODA accreditation in 2020. In Florida, dental therapists would be required to be graduates of CODA-approved programs.</p>
<p><i>Minnesota has about 50 dental therapists practicing and most of them are NOT practicing in rural areas. Even with dental therapists, in May 2017, Minnesota was in jeopardy of losing federal funding because it was failing to provide adequate dental care to children of low-income families.</i></p>	<p>In Minnesota, about 92 dental therapists are geographically distributed in proportion to the state's population. Approximately 59 percent of dental therapists are employed in the Greater Twin Cities metro area – where about 55 percent of Minnesotans live. However, many of those employed in urban areas travel to rural areas to provide care with mobile equipment. In Florida, dental therapists must practice in settings and locations that have 50 percent of their patients on Medicaid.</p>
<p><i>Dental therapists are NOT like physician assistants (PAs). PAs are required to have much more education and training than dental therapists.</i></p>	<p>Dental therapists are similar to PAs, as they are an expansion of the health care team treating patients. Also, like PAs, dental therapists must graduate from accredited programs and pass competency exams of the same rigor as dentists for the procedures they have in common.</p>
<p><i>Dental therapists will create a two-tiered system of care. Our most vulnerable populations will have care that is not to the same standard as the rest of the population.</i></p>	<p>We already have a two-tiered system of care, those who get dental care and those who do not. Dental therapist will create a greater system of care, similar to how medicine practices, as they will be part of the dental health care team, working under the supervision of a dentist. Their education and state licensing exam requirements are exactly the same as a dentist for their limited tasks they perform.</p>