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Rowen Zetterman, MD  
Interim Dean  
UNMC College of Dentistry  
[rzetterman@unmc.edu](mailto:rzetterman@unmc.edu)

Jenny Kruger, Ph.D.  
V.P. Academic Affairs  
Iowa Western Comm. College  
[jkruger@iwcc.edu](mailto:jkruger@iwcc.edu)

Ms. Sarah Kort  
Dean of Instruction  
Central Comm. College  
[sarahkort@cccneb.edu](mailto:sarahkort@cccneb.edu)

*Sent via email only*

Dear Drs. Zetterman and Kruger and Ms. Kort:

Nebraska, along with the rest of our nation, is facing a severe shortage of dental hygienists and assistants; this shortage has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The [ADA's Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Report](#) states that currently, 95% of dentists seeking to hire a hygienist and 87% of dentists seeking to hire an assistant find the hiring process to be extremely or very challenging. [A 2020 study](#) by the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) found that the pandemic resulted in a voluntary contraction of the U.S. dental hygiene workforce by an estimated 3.75%, or approximately 7,500 dental hygienists.

UNMC updated their [Status of the Nebraska Healthcare Workforce: Update 2022](#) which tells us that the number of dental professionals decreased between 2019 and 2021. The number of dentists per 100,000 population fell from 56.2 to 53.6, while the number of dental hygienists decreased from 73.8 to 65.8 per 100,000 population. The supply of dental hygienists has decreased significantly in Nebraska since 2019, from 1,423 to 1,292 dental hygienists in 2021, a 9% decline.

Furthermore, an [October 2022 study](#) by the American Dental Association (ADA), ADHA, and the Dental Assisting National Board found one-third of the hygienists and assistants workforce indicated they expect to retire in five years or less. These retirement rates outpacing dental hygiene school output are compounding the ongoing dental labor shortage.

The severe shortage of hygienists and assistants is having a negative impact on access to care, with patients having to wait months to receive preventative dental care in both private practice and public health settings. This shortage and the need to make impactful, timely changes cannot be overstated.

Across the country, states are taking a multifaceted approach to increase the dental hygiene and assisting workforce. For example, seventeen state dental associations recently wrote CODA, asking CODA about their methodology or rationale for specifically setting the faculty to student ratios used in its various Accreditation Standards. CODA leadership was unable to articulate any specific methodology or rationale for determining the faculty to student ratios for dental hygiene (1 to 5), or dental assisting (1 to 6) other than their "long-standing history" in the Accreditation Standards. It is clear that CODA believes that faculty to student ratios are necessary, but there is no apparent criteria for why 1 to 5 or 1 to 6 is appropriate for dental auxiliary education and a ratio of 1 to 4, 1 to 7, or some other ratio is inappropriate.

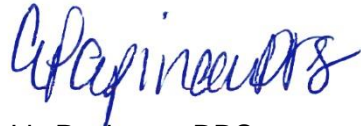
While we believe our request will not, by itself, eliminate the current workforce shortages, we do believe these changes will be a catalyst in expanding workforce in alignment with CODA's articulated Mission, Vision, and Values of collegiality, consistency, integrity, quality, and transparency.

Considering other efforts to increase workforce, the most effective would seem to be increasing the capacity of your institutions to graduate more hygienists. Central Community College's website states that the wait list for hygiene is approximately three years. Are your institutions considering increasing the class size for your hygiene programs? If not, why not? If so, how can the NDA help in your effort?

Hopefully, this letter will begin a dialogue – as the previously cited *Dental Workforce Shortages* report states:

*Shoring up the workforce pipeline will require long-term changes. The numbers of new dental hygienists and dental assistants graduating from allied education programs may not be enough to compensate the losses of team members who permanently left the profession during the pandemic. There may be another wave of retirements in the next few years that will put additional pressure on the workforce pipeline. Innovations are necessary to shore up the pipeline for long-term sustainability of the dental workforce.*

Thank you for your consideration.



Liz Papineau, DDS  
President

C: Merlyn Vogt, DDS, UNMC – [mvogt@unmc.edu](mailto:mvogt@unmc.edu)  
Dr. Wanda Cloet, DHSC, RDH - [wcloet@cccneb.edu](mailto:wcloet@cccneb.edu)  
Laura Grabow, Dental Hygiene Department Chair IWCC - [lgrabow@iwcc.edu](mailto:lgrabow@iwcc.edu)  
Bev Cummins, M.Ed., Southeast Community College - [bcummins@southeast.edu](mailto:bcummins@southeast.edu)  
Tom McDonnell, Metro Community College - [jemery1@mccneb.edu](mailto:jemery1@mccneb.edu)