

Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner

Resources:

Domestic and family violence

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Contents

What is domestic and family violence?	3
Relevant professional competencies	3
Domain 1. Social responsibility and professionalism	3
Domain 2. Communication and leadership	4
Domain 6. Person-centred care	4
Why is it important for dental practitioners to recognise and care for people experiencing domestic and family violence?	4
References	5
Resources	5

What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence is a national issue and is widespread across all age groups, genders, socio-economic groups and cultures.

The Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) stated the following definition for domestic and family violence:

Domestic and family violence is described by the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)¹ as

' ... family violence is –

- a) Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour –
 - I. Is physically or sexually abusive; or
 - II. Is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
 - III. Is economically abusive; or
 - IV. Is threatening; or
 - V. Is coercive; or
 - VI. In any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or well being of that family member or another person;
- b) Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).'

Dental practitioners play a vital role as first responders in being able to recognise and assist patients who present with trauma that could be related to family violence.²

Relevant professional competencies

The revised Competencies include specific reference to 'people who have experienced violence and abuse including sexual abuse' in the broader definition of 'Groups or populations at increased risk of harm or poor oral health', which states that 'all Professional competencies must take into account people, groups and populations at greater risk of harm and/or poor oral health outcomes, that face greater challenges in accessing oral health care, as existing systems, policies and process may not meet their needs'.

The Competencies now include the following:

Domain 1. Social responsibility and professionalism

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- comply with Commonwealth State and Territory legislation and regulatory requirements relevant to the dental practitioner and the provision of dental care.

Domain 2. Communication and leadership

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- engage in interprofessional collaborative practice to provide person-centred care
- recognise, assess, and respond to domestic and family violence risk, prioritise safety, provide information, and refer as required
- identify opportunities for improvement in care delivery and advocate for improved oral health outcomes, including for groups or populations at increased risk of harm or poor oral health

Domain 6. Person-centred care

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- recognise health as it relates to the individual, taking into consideration medical, social and cultural contexts
- determine when and how to refer to the appropriate health and or care professional.

Why is it important for dental practitioners to recognise and care for people experiencing domestic and family violence?

Dental practitioners can play an important role in responding to family violence, as evidence shows that 76 per cent of women who experience domestic and family violence would cancel other medical appointments but keep their dental appointments.²

Women may disclose the experiences of domestic abuse if asked and, although there may be barriers to disclosing this information to the dentist, the dental practice is an avenue that can be used for appropriately signposting patients to relevant services.³

Dental practitioners must be able to identify that people in their care may be experiencing inappropriate and/or violent behaviour from another person. This requires knowledge of the indicators (physical, emotional and/or behavioural signs and symptoms) associated with domestic and family violence. It is also important that practitioners have a system in place that includes referral pathways and are aware of state and territory laws with respect to reporting requirements.⁴

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