Maine Board of Dental Practice
Policy Guidance #2016-01 - Independent Practice Dental Hygiene Referral Network
Adopted 12/09/2016 (previously adopted April 2009)

*Note: Board policies are offered to licensees as guidance only and are not enforceable.

A registered dental hygienist who practices with an independent practice dental hygiene authority is considered to be the primary care provider for patients receiving hygiene services. There will be instances when patients will have dental needs that are beyond the scope of the dental hygienist’s authority to practice. Recognizing conditions that may be detrimental to a patient’s oral health has long been a function of the practicing dental hygienist. Traditionally these conditions have been brought to the attention of a supervising dentist whose responsibilities to the patient include appropriate diagnosis, treatment and/or referral. The result was that the patient’s needs were clearly identified and options for treatment were available. However, as the identified primary care provider, it is the expectation of the Maine Board of Dental Practice (“Board”) that the licensee will have in place a referral network of dental professionals to handle conditions outside of their scope of practice. Such referral network should include restorative dentists, and specialists such as oral surgeons, periodontists, endodontists, orthodontists, and denturists. This expectation is no different than that of general dentists.

Referrals should be made in writing and clearly identify the condition(s) that prompted the referral. The licensee accepting the referral is obligated to use his or her level of training to complete the assessment, diagnosing and treatment planning for referred patients. He or she will then treat for the referring condition and be responsible for only that portion of the patient’s care they provide. If additional oral health conditions are identified, it is the responsibility of the second provider to inform the patient, but not to treat the additional conditions unless an agreement between patient and the second provider is reached. If additional dental conditions are treated, then it is the responsibility of the second provider to inform the referring provider of those services rendered.

Once referred treatment is completed, ethical standards require that the patient is returned to the referring licensee. Patients, however retain the right to choose their dental provider as long as such provider is willing and able to accept them in their practice.

The Board recommends that appropriate informed consent is obtained by the licensee accepting the referral, and that the referral clearly identifies the procedures to be performed. Such consent may also clearly state that the referred patient will not be a “patient of record” of the licensee accepting referral, but will be returned to the referring entity once treatment is complete.