

## Referral to Dentist or Dental Specialist by Dental Therapists

A registered dental therapist must refer, to a dentist or dental specialist, all cases outside the scope of the profession of dental therapy which may include, but are not limited to-

1. pulpal exposure;
2. impacted teeth;
3. malocclusion;
4. the replacement of missing teeth, including the requirements for fixed and removable prostheses, or implants; or
5. oral and maxillofacial pathology.

*Patient Education  
Information  
brought to you by*



**SADA**  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
DENTAL ASSOCIATION



© 2021  
South African Dental Association  
Private Bag 1  
Houghton, Gauteng  
South Africa  
T: +27 11 484 5288  
E: [info@sada.co.za](mailto:info@sada.co.za)  
[www.sada.co.za](http://www.sada.co.za)

**Meet the  
Dental Therapist**

## What is a Dental Therapist?

Dental Therapists function as mid-level workers in oral health team, independently and/or as a part of the multi-disciplinary healthcare team.

Dental Therapists focus on the holistic care of patients, which ranges from prevention of oral disease and promotion of oral health to the alleviation of oral abnormalities, pain and disease and also function in the fields of preventive, promotive and rehabilitative health, on primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

They would refer more complicated procedures and treatments to a dentist. Dental Therapists are not permitted to use the title 'Dr' with their name.

Dental Therapists may not practise independently unless they have practised for at least one year under the control and supervision of a qualified dentist or dental therapist after qualification.

Dental Therapists are subject to registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa that apply more broadly to all oral health and dental professionals including dentists, oral hygienists and dental assistants.

## What education does a Dental Therapist need?

Dental Therapists receive their education through university with a three-year Bachelor of Dental Therapy.

Those qualifying with the Bachelor of Dental Therapy degree can work in the public sector as well as in private practice.

What does the dental therapist do in the practice?

Some dental practices employ dental therapists, who provide all services that are within their scope of practice so that dentists are able to focus on more complex and advanced dental problems and procedures that a dental therapist is not permitted to perform.

## What does the dental therapist do in the practice?

The scope and field of the dental therapist is limited and they must refer patients requiring care beyond their scope of practice, and patients unable to be managed within their practice, to a dentist or to another health practitioner.

It is the responsibility of the dental therapist to recognise the need to refer a patient's care and to ensure that the referral is appropriately documented.

The dental therapist must ensure that the patient and/or their guardian are aware of the need to seek additional care from a dentist, dental specialist or other health practitioner.

Decisions and actions taken independently by dental therapists are their personal responsibility.

Accountability for the standard of decisions and care undertaken independently remains with the dental therapist.

The treatment that dental therapists may provide is limited and contained in the scope of practice set down by the regulator within approved education, training and competence.

They cannot carry out all the procedures reserved for dentists or dental specialists.

Dental therapy practice involves:

1. The recording of patients' medical history and identification of medical risk cases that may complicate oral health treatment;
2. the recording of patients' dental history, the examination of patients, and the charting and diagnosis of their oral and dental status;
3. the diagnosis and identification of extra -oral and intra -oral abnormalities;
4. the debridement, scaling, non -surgical root planning, and polishing of teeth;
5. the direct restorative procedures;
6. the non -surgical removal of teeth and roots under local anaesthetics and placement of sutures, where appropriate;
7. the treatment of post- extraction complications, amongst other things, post -extraction bleeding and alveolar osteitis;
8. the application of primary preventive and therapeutic measures, including health promotion;
9. the emergency treatment of minor traumatic injuries to teeth and surrounding tissues;
10. the taking of intra -oral and extra -oral radiographs for the purpose of performing acts that pertain to the profession of dental therapy;
11. the prescribing of medication for the treatment of oral conditions relevant to the practice of dental therapy and as prescribed in Schedule 1, Annexure 2: amended from time to time; and
12. the performance of aesthetic procedure within the ambit of dental therapy.