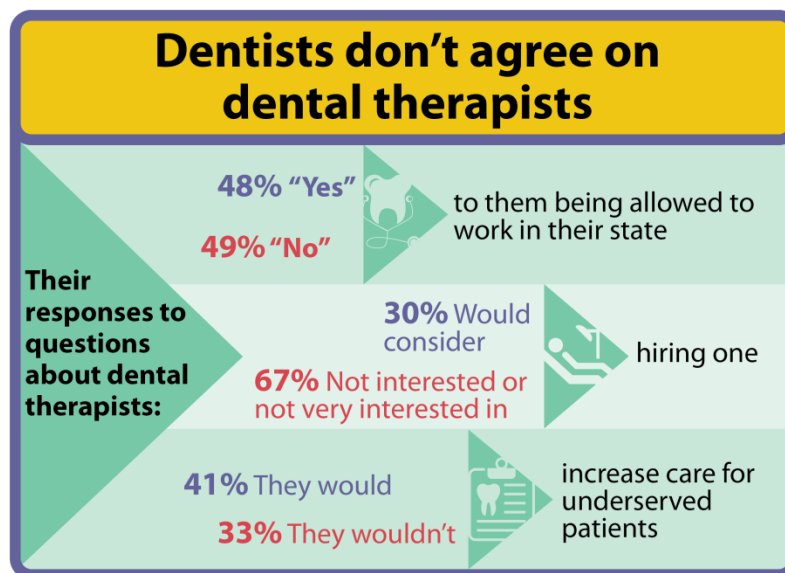


Quick Poll Results: Dentists Disagree on Role of Dental Therapists

Dentists and hygienists who responded to our November Quick Poll are split almost 50-50 on whether dentists in their state should have the option to hire a dental therapist, a relatively new group of dental professionals authorized in very few states. With 504 votes cast, 249 (49 percent) respondents opposed and 244 (48 percent) supported dental therapists working in their states. (About 2 percent of poll respondents didn't answer the question.)

Compared to dental hygienists, dental therapists get more training and are allowed to provide more care, including routine fillings and nonsurgical extractions, under the supervision of a dentist.¹ They are currently licensed to work in Minnesota, Maine, Vermont, and in some Native American tribes.² About a dozen state legislatures are considering authorizing dental therapists.³



Proponents of dental therapists argue that they will expand access to care for low income and other underserved groups.⁴ While 41 percent of our poll respondents agreed with that sentiment, 33 percent disagreed. Another 26 percent were unsure. (Minnesota law requires dental therapists to care primarily for underserved patients.⁵)

The majority of respondents knew about dental therapists before taking the poll; only 7 percent weren't familiar with them. Most respondents (67 percent) said that they probably wouldn't hire a dental therapist; only about 30 percent expressed interest in doing so.

Most respondents (63 percent) had specific concerns about the care provided by dental therapists and many used the poll's comment area to express some of those worries. The poll generated more than 1,000 comments.

The main fear expressed was that dental therapists wouldn't be adequately prepared to do surgical procedures. As one respondent wrote, "Cutting teeth by a nondentist [is] not good at all." But the few respondents who had worked with dental therapists praised the quality of their work.

Respondents were also concerned that dental therapists would take work from dentists. However, the comments reflected a diversity of feelings about dental therapists.

One respondent wrote that dental therapists "should practice independently" of dentists.

To continue the conversation, go to Quick Poll Results in the [Member Forum](#).

¹ Re: under the supervision of a dentist: Minnesota in folder, p. 5, Levels of Supervision and ADHA doc

² See ADHD dental therapists in folder

³ <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CIK6a-sUoAA4CSg.png:large> (In folder: Map of states)

⁴ See "Minnesota" folder, p. 2

⁵ See Minnesota in folder p. 1