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May 20, 2009

The Honourable Mr. Hector Goudreau
Minister of Employment and Immigration
423 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Sir,

On behalf of dental staff and dental auxiliary organizations in Alberta, we are asking for removal of Dental Offices from Workers Compensation Board (WCB) exempt status (voluntary) to compulsory status.

The dental industry has evolved over time and has experienced many changes since WCB industry classifications were assigned. Registered Dental Assistants (RDA), Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH) and other dental staff work in environments that expose them to risks listed under Schedule B of the Workers Compensation Regulations (such as Infections caused by Hepatitis B, poisoning by mercury and other toxic substances). Dental professionals are at risk of musculoskeletal injuries due to the physical nature of their work in clinical practice which can lead to career ending or disabling conditions. RDA's, RDH's and others in dental offices perform similar operations, have some of the same duties and face the same risks as those who work in a dental laboratory or denture clinic (all classified under Industry Code 82700). In addition, they have more direct patient contact and exponentially greater exposure to communicable infectious diseases than staff working in medical offices. Under the Health Professions Act, RDA's work in a supportive role under Dental Technologists and Denturists. The fact that these workplaces are already included under compulsory WCB should make re-classification for dental offices more compelling. The risks in dental offices correspond more closely to Industry Code 82700 than to the risks associated with working in medical offices. Due to the high risks and seriousness of these types of exposures and injuries, dental staff working in private clinics are in dire need of our governments' protection through compulsory Workers Compensation coverage.

The Alberta government has shown their concern for public safety through the Health Professions Act. We are confident that the government would also want to ensure that they have fully addressed the other side of the coin which is the safety of those who are employed in health workplaces.

Dental employees working for Regional Health Authorities in Alberta are covered under WCB as all operations for the RHA are compulsory for this coverage. This coverage for dental employees working for the government but not for those employed by private dental employers has inadvertently created a two-tier system in our province. Dental staff employed by the government and those employed by private dental offices are exposed to the same risks. As the Alberta government has rightly seen fit to

ensure that their dental employees receive adequate protection and benefits for workplace related injuries and illnesses we ask that our legislators also extend that protection equally to dental staff throughout the province.

By re-classifying dental offices to compulsory status, the government will be able to provide more reliable and complete data to address the volume of injuries and types of injuries that dental professionals and other dental employees are experiencing. As a result we will be able to make informed improvements in workplace safety in dental environments. While Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) requires that all workplaces comply with their regulations, it may be that dental environments would only be inspected if a complaint was received by OHS. Dental workplace safety and improvements to dental workplace safety could be enhanced under compulsory WCB coverage to provide additional statistically-based evidence, leading to improved working environments, staff safety and reduced loss of dental staff. Resulting research could continue to identify dental workplace hazards and result in considerable savings in Employment Insurance claims.

Dental professionals in British Columbia and Saskatchewan are protected under compulsory WCB and Quebec has compulsory coverage for all workers in that province. The Alberta government has proven through past legislation that our province is a leader within Canada in many areas including protection for workers rights. By removing dental offices from exempt status our province will ensure that there is equal access to protection and benefits under WCB for all dental staff in Alberta.

Supporting documentation enclosed with our request includes but is not limited to:

- 8 letters of support for re-classification from many dental assisting organizations in Alberta and throughout Canada including the College of Alberta Dental Assistants and the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta, the two regulatory bodies representing the majority of dental employees in our province.

- Correspondence from an RDA retired from the dental profession due to workplace illness
- Correspondence from an RDA currently working who has experienced injuries related to her work (many dental staff have indicated they are afraid of losing their jobs should their employers find out they are providing us with this information and we are protecting her identity for that reason)

- Correspondence from an RDA currently working who has experienced injuries related to her work and was covered under WCB

To ensure that all dental staff throughout the province receive the same protection and recognition for workplace injuries and illnesses we respectfully request that Dental Offices be removed from exempt status to require that all employers of dental staff provide compulsory WCB coverage for their employees.

Respectfully,

Edmonton Dental Assistants Association on behalf of the dental auxiliary staff of Alberta,



Dianne Hennig, SStJ RDA EDAA Administrative Director



Janet Hazen, RDA EDAA President 2008-09

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