

March 5, 2021

Dear Dental Board:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express our concerns regarding a recently published position issued by the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine (AADSM). This statement encourages the use of home sleep apnea tests by dentists for the diagnosis of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). We argue that ordering, administering, and interpreting home sleep apnea tests is outside the scope of practice for dentists, and herein are requesting that your board protect both patients and dentists in your state by adopting a policy to clarify this fact.

The AADSM [position](#) states that it is within the scope of practice for dentists to identify patients who are at risk for OSA and then order or administer diagnostic home sleep apnea tests. Furthermore, since most state dental boards have no policy addressing this issue, the AADSM position indicates that this “silence” gives dentists tacit permission to provide this medical service, which is a dangerous interpretation. This position statement is in direct conflict with [that](#) of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and a [policy](#) of the American Medical Association (AMA), both of which emphasize that a home sleep apnea test is a medical assessment that must be ordered by a medical provider and, moreover, must be reviewed and interpreted by a physician who is either board-certified in sleep medicine or overseen by a board-certified sleep medicine physician. The AADSM position also is not supported by the [policy statement](#) of the American Dental Association (ADA) or by a [white paper](#) from the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO).

An evidence-based AASM [clinical practice guideline](#) indicates that the decision to order a home sleep apnea test should be made by a medical provider only after reviewing the patient's medical history and conducting a face-to-face examination. The medical evaluation should include a thorough sleep history and a physical examination of the respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurologic systems. The sleep history is important because many patients have more than one sleep disorder or present with atypical sleep apnea symptoms. The medical provider also should identify chronic diseases and conditions that are associated with increased risk for OSA, such as obesity, hypertension, stroke, and congestive heart failure. An evaluation by a medical provider also is necessary to rule out conditions that place the patient at increased risk of central sleep apnea and other forms of non-obstructive sleep-disordered breathing, which typical home sleep apnea tests are insufficient to detect. While dentists can use questionnaires and examine the oral structures to screen patients for symptoms of OSA, they are untrained in conducting the comprehensive medical evaluation needed to assess OSA risk.

Based on this medical evaluation, the medical provider can determine if diagnostic testing is indicated to confirm a clinical suspicion of OSA. The selection of the appropriate diagnostic test — either in-lab polysomnography or a home sleep apnea test — is critical. Because a home sleep apnea test is less sensitive than polysomnography, it is more likely to produce false negative results when ordered inappropriately. The resulting misdiagnosis can lead to significant harm for the patient. Because dentists lack the required medical education and training needed to order, administer, and interpret diagnostic tests for OSA, implementing the AADSM position could jeopardize the quality of patient care.

In addition, the AADSM position does not align with the current national and local coverage determination policies of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the policies of private insurers for reimbursement of home sleep apnea tests and oral appliances for OSA.

These medical insurance policies also require a comprehensive clinical evaluation by a medical provider to determine that the test or treatment is reasonable and necessary. Patients will have to pay full price for the uncovered services provided by a dentist, dramatically increasing their out-of-pocket costs.

It is for the aforementioned reasons that our organizations urge your board to adopt a policy clarifying that ordering and administering a home sleep apnea test is outside the scope of practice for dentists in your state. We encourage you to use as a model the [policy adopted](#) by the Georgia Board of Dentistry, "Prescribing and Fabrication of Sleep Apnea Appliances":

*Depending upon the diagnosis of the type and severity, one possible treatment option for obstructive apnea is the use of oral appliances. The design, fitting and use of oral appliances and the maintenance of oral health related to the appliance falls within the scope of practice of dentistry. The continuing evaluation of a person's sleep apnea, the effect of the oral appliance on the apnea, and the need for, and type of, alternative treatment do not fall within the scope of dentistry. Therefore, the prescribing of sleep apnea appliance does not fall within the scope of the practice of dentistry. It is the position of the Board that a dentist may not order a sleep study. Home sleep studies should only be ordered and interpreted by a licensed physician. Therefore, only under the orders of a physician should a dentist fabricate a sleep apnea appliance for the designated patient and conduct only those tasks permitted under O.C.G.A. Title 43, Chapter 11. (adopted 04/01/16)*

We thank you for your consideration of our concerns. For any additional information or to discuss this issue, please contact AASM Executive Director Steve Van Hout at (630) 737-9700.

Sincerely,

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