

APR 25 2016

Steven J. Austin, D.D.S.

Comprehensive General and
Restorative Dentistry

Master, Academy of General Dentistry

2815 South Georgia Street • Amarillo, Texas 79109

(806) 358-7646

drsjaustin@suddenlinkmail.com

April 25, 2016

Dear Sunset Committee,

I must admit that I was taken aback by the evaluation of the Board in the Sunset Staff Report at the first reading. The primary reason for my initial reaction is twofold. First, I have been an appointee for the last eight years. I have been through all five Executive Directors and five General Counsels. There is only one department head that is still employed from when I came on to the board. I have also served under four different presiding officers. However, I believe the staff is stronger, more cohesive, more creative, and productive than it has ever been. I feel that it is poised to meet and exceed performance standards more than ever before. Second, I believe the current board members are hardworking public servants that do have public safety foremost in their minds. Therefore, now my reaction to the report is that it contains constructive criticism that will help us make a course correction to better serve and protect the public. I feel that we have an Executive Director and staff as well as a board that can make that happen.

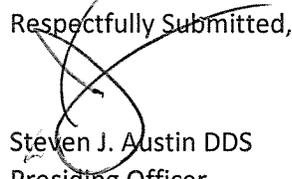
With this in mind I would like to make the following response...

1. We accept the challenge that anesthesia safety is a growing concern with the public, the governor and the legislature. The public has demanded that dentistry be done in a comfortable setting especially for many surgical procedures. There has been a great increase in the number of dentists providing these services with relatively few bad outcomes. Nevertheless, we view one negative outcome as too many and want to put safeguards in place that will make this part of dentistry as safe as possible. The adoption of rules regarding inspections and safety protocol will be a priority.
2. I believe the current board size is necessary for carrying out the function of the board. The seven dental members allow for a diversity of geographic, demographic, and practice styles. This diversity is critical in the discussions involving rule making, standard of care issues, and strategic planning. This diversity is a safety net even in the process of signing off on board sanctions to make sure they are fair and equitable to both the complainant and the respondent. There are a growing number of informal settlement conferences which require board member attendance. These settlements require a day of preparation and a day of attendance plus travel. This would be a burden on a small board. It would be very expensive to the state to have to depend more on paid staff or consultants. Currently four board members examine for WREB. Even though the staff no longer administers the exam, board members are needed to fill roles as graders for the exam and participate in the formulation of the exam and operation of the Western Regional Examining Board. For all these tasks, I believe the added cost of a full slate of board members is minimal compare to the production of these members.

3. We believe that dental assistants are a critical part of delivery of care to the public. Radiology safety, infection control, and nitrous oxide monitoring are three of many public safety roles that they perform. Not only are they the dentist's right hand but they are a confidante to our patients that are critical to helping us provide comfortable and save care. The different credentialing elements provided by our board help give our staff a cost effective degree of training and impetus for continuing training. It provides a means of screening a potential employee for criminal activity. It also helps track these employees as they might move from office to office. The revenue received from this credentialing self-funds the action of the board. The cost to the individual office is much lower than the training and credentialing we might have to attain in the private setting. This credentialing also give this large number of Texans a sense of pride that they are a part of professional delivery of care to the public.
4. Patient advocacy and patient care go hand in hand. We want to keep ourselves at arm's length from the stakeholder. We want to take advantage of their insight and perspective but most stakeholders are not primarily representing the public but the providers. I view the board as the public's stakeholders. A majority of our contact with the public comes from those who bring a complaint to the board. Our role as board members is to represent the public as we evaluate these complaints. Through board member training, advice from our legal staff, and my leadership as presiding officer I pledge to keep public safety and public interest as a priority.
5. The hygienist and the dental lab professionals are a critical part of the dental team. Currently the dental hygienists are well represented on the board. I believe their number should remain at two. The dental lab professionals are a hidden element in the delivery of care but directly reflect the quality of prostheses that the public receives. I agree that between the two hygienist represented on the board plus stakeholder meetings representing hygiene interest, and also stakeholder meetings representing lab professionals, the staff and board would have better direct contact with both parties and better coordinate patient care and safety.
6. With regard to Issue Four, dealing with licensing and regulatory functions, I believe changes would be generated by the executive director and legal staff. We have stability in these positions and my intention is to empower them to do their job to bring rule and policy changes that the board will thoughtfully consider and adopt. Those items that need statutory changes, we would request that those elements be considered thoughtfully by the legislature.

I would request patience as we address these issues. Our intention is to address them thoughtfully, methodically, and respectfully. Our intention will be to be fair and honest in our dealings and to keep an eye on our primary goal, public safety.

Respectfully Submitted,


Steven J. Austin DDS
Presiding Officer
Texas State Board of Dental Examiners