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In the new Aged Care Act Rules, the only mention of a dental practitioner is that we are not part of the allied health professions (page 2). Dental practitioners, dentists, oral health therapists, dental hygienists, dental therapists and dental prosthetists are not mentioned as providing any services to persons in aged care. Oral health and general health are connected. Poor oral health leads to illness, hospitalisation and death from sepsis, aspiration pneumonia and infective endocarditis.

Under Nursing, nurses are required to provide assistance with, or provision of support for, personal hygiene, including oral health management and considerations for bariatric care needs (page 35).

Under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009, 'dental acts' are restricted to dental and medical practitioners only. Dentistry involves assessing, preventing, diagnosing, advising on, and treating any injuries, diseases, deficiencies, deformities or lesions on or of the human teeth, mouth or jaws or associated structures. It includes restricted dental acts (see section 121 of the National Law).<https://www.dentalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines/Policies-Codes-Guidelines/Guidelines-Scope-of-practice.aspx>

Therefore, nurses are not equipped to perform this important role of oral health management as they are not able to diagnose dental caries and periodontal diseases. Nurses should not be put into the impossible situation of not being able to assess, prevent, diagnose, and advise on, oral and dental conditions and diseases in the aged and home care sectors. They can only do this role with the assistance and guidance of dental practitioners.

Dental practitioners must therefore be included as providing services under the new Aged Care Act and Rules.