A Brief Introduction on the National Licensing Examination and Dentist Registration Ordinance in China

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For decades, there were no official licensing examinations and registration scheme for doctors and dentists in Mainland China. After graduation, the medical and dental students were permitted to start practicing in government hospitals and clinics under the supervision of senior staff. In some rural or remote areas, even the ones who graduated from post-secondary schools including vocational schools could provide medical or dental care for their clients. This situation has been greatly changed since the promulgation of the Registration Ordinance for Medical and Dental Practitioners on June 26, 1998. The first national examination for medical and dental licenses was held in 1999. Currently, the Examination is held annually by the National Board of Medical Examiners and operated by the National Medical Examination Center (covering dental examination) in Beijing. At present, it consists of a clinical test and written test. The clinical test is designed to test candidate’s manual dexterity and ability to apply their professional knowledge to clinical practice. The written test is based upon multiple-choice question papers on basic medical sciences, clinical medicine in relation to dentistry, clinical dentistry and other related fields, such as health policy, ethics, jurisdiction and legislation etc. The candidates must pass the clinical test and then they may continue to sit for the written examination. Upon passing the Examination, a person will be eligible to obtain dental license and registration with the local governing body.

In China, since 1950 all university dental schools are affiliated to medical universities and to a certain extent the dental curriculum is different from the Western countries. The junior dental students are trained together with medical students in both basic medical sciences and clinical medicine, and then senior dental students continue their training in all disciplines of dentistry. Therefore, the Ordinance mentioned above applies to both medical and dental practitioners with respect to licensing examination and registration.

According to the Ordinance, the ones who graduate from university after May 1999 with a bachelor degree in dentistry from an accredited school and have completed one-year intern training under the supervision of licensed dentists are permitted to sit for the examination. For the time being, those candidates who fulfill the following requirements are also allowed to apply for participation in the examination: graduates from the junior college with a certificate in dentistry and a license for assistant dentist (formerly called dental therapist), and having not less than two-year clinical experience; or graduates from the post-secondary/vocational school with a license for assistant dentist and having not less than five-year working experience. The license examination is waived for those who have dentally qualified and practiced for many years before the Ordinance was brought into effect in 1999.

Since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) a few years ago, overseas dentists including those from the regions of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are allowed to practice in Mainland China. Overseas trained dentists who wish to register as dentists in China should ask their employer in China as the sponsor to apply for the license examination. As required, the candidates have to submit the following documents to support their applications: a signed application form, certified dental qualification/degrees, overseas dental license and personal health certificate with notarization. A temporary license for overseas dentists will be issued to the successful candidates, which is renewable annually.

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