

# Scope of Practice of Orthodontic Therapists in the UK

Roles and responsibilities defined within dental healthcare

1

# Scope of Practice of Orthodontic Therapists (UK)

2

## Title and Introduction



- **Role of Orthodontic Therapists**
  - Orthodontic therapists are key members of the orthodontic team delivering patient care under dental prescription.
- **Scope and Regulation**
  - Understanding the permitted clinical activities and regulatory standards ensures safe and lawful practice.
- **Supervision and Accountability**
  - Supervision, accountability, consent, and governance are essential to maintain patient safety and quality care.
- **Interactive Learning**
  - Use of MCOs and SAOs promotes reflection and understanding of real-world clinical scenarios.

3

## Learning Objectives



- Role and Scope Understanding**  
Describe the role of orthodontic therapists and their scope according to the General Dental Council guidelines.
- Legal and Professional Framework**  
Understand legal and professional standards, including delegation and supervision in orthodontic therapy practice.
- Clinical Procedure Identification**  
Identify permitted clinical procedures for orthodontic therapists and distinguish those outside their scope.
- Accountability and Assessment**  
Explain accountability within the team and apply knowledge through clinical scenarios and assessments.

4

## Who Are Orthodontic Therapists?



- Role and Responsibilities**  
Orthodontic therapists deliver prescribed orthodontic treatments safely and efficiently within defined professional boundaries.
- Training and Registration**  
Therapists complete a 12-18 month approved training program and must register with the General Dental Council to practise.
- Multidisciplinary Team**  
They work alongside orthodontists, dentists, nurses, hygienists, and therapists as part of a collaborative team.
- Purpose and Benefits**  
Introduced to improve access to orthodontic care and allow orthodontists to focus on complex clinical decisions.

5

## Regulation by the General Dental Council



- Role of the GDC**  
The General Dental Council regulates dental professionals to ensure high standards of education, registration, and conduct.
- Compliance Requirements**  
Orthodontic therapists must follow GDC standards, maintain indemnity, and complete continuing professional development.
- Public Protection**  
Regulation protects the public by holding dental therapists accountable for professional actions and standards.
- Fitness to Practise**  
Practising outside scope or failing standards can lead to fitness to practise procedures and consequences.

6



### GDC Scope of Practice – Core Principle

**Defined Scope and Competence**  
Orthodontic therapists perform tasks they are trained and competent to do under dentist prescription.

**Limitations of Practice**  
Therapists do not diagnose, plan treatment, or initiate care independently to ensure patient safety.

**Supervision and Support**  
Prescribing dentists provide supervision and ensure delegated tasks are safely and effectively carried out.

7



### Clinical Activities: What Orthodontic Therapists Can Do

**Permitted Orthodontic Tasks**  
Orthodontic therapists perform tasks like fitting bands, placing brackets, archwires, ligatures, and auxiliaries as prescribed by dentists.

**Removal of Fixed Appliances**  
Therapists may safely remove fixed orthodontic appliances at treatment completion with skill and precision.

**Patient Care and Safety**  
Continuous assessment of patient comfort and safety is essential, with therapists reporting concerns to supervising clinicians.

8

### Preventive and Supportive Care



**Oral Hygiene Instruction**  
Therapists provide tailored oral hygiene guidance for patients with fixed and removable orthodontic appliances.

**Fluoride Application**  
Application of fluoride varnish helps reduce the risk of demineralisation and dental caries during treatment.

**Dietary Advice Reinforcement**  
Orthodontic therapists reinforce dietary advice to support oral health and prevent complications.

**Collaborative Patient Support**  
Therapists work with orthodontists and hygienists to deliver consistent oral health messages to patients and families.

9

### Record Taking and Clinical Monitoring



**Clinical Record Collection**  
Orthodontic therapists collect intraoral and extraoral photos, digital scans, and impressions to document patient status accurately.

**Monitoring Patient Progress**  
Accurate records enable effective monitoring of treatment progress and appliance condition throughout care.

**Role of Prescribing Dentist**  
Therapists gather records, but diagnostic interpretation and clinical decisions rest with the prescribing dentist.

**Documentation Importance**  
Clear, contemporaneous documentation supports governance, communication, and ensures patient safety during treatment.

10

### Activities Outside the Scope of Orthodontic Therapists



**Scope Limitations**  
Orthodontic therapists must not diagnose malocclusion or formulate treatment plans independently.

**Prohibited Procedures**  
Therapists cannot decide on extractions, prescribe appliances, radiographs, or medications.

**Professional Responsibility**  
Adhering to scope protects patients and ensures complex clinical decisions are made by dentists.

**Understanding Boundaries**  
Recognizing limits is as crucial as knowing permitted activities for safe practice.

11

### Delegation and Supervision



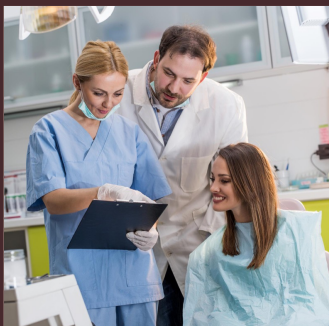
**Role of Delegation**  
Delegation is essential in orthodontic therapy for ensuring tasks match the therapist's competence and support patient safety.

**Types of Supervision**  
Supervision can be direct with the dentist present, or indirect with the dentist available but offsite.

**Proportionate Supervision**  
Supervision levels should align with task complexity, therapist experience, and patient needs for optimal care.

**Benefits of Clear Delegation**  
Clear delegation protects patients and promotes effective team work within orthodontic clinical practice.

12



## Accountability and Responsibility

**Personal Accountability**  
Orthodontic therapists are individually accountable for their actions and must work within their level of competence.

**Shared Responsibility**  
The prescribing dentist holds overall responsibility while collaboration and communication are essential in the care team.

**Patient Safety and Advocacy**  
Therapists must raise concerns about inappropriate tasks to protect patient safety and uphold professional duties.

13



## Consent and Communication

**Role in Consent Process**  
Orthodontic therapists reinforce information and explain procedures, supporting valid patient consent.

**Effective Communication Benefits**  
Clear communication reduces patient anxiety and builds trust in the dental care process.

**Scope and Referral**  
Therapists must work within agreed plans and refer complex questions to prescribing dentists.

14



## Ethics and Professionalism

**Ethical Principles**  
Orthodontic therapists must follow ethical principles including competence, confidentiality, and respect for patients.

**Professionalism Standards**  
Professionalism involves recognizing limitations, lifelong learning, and responding to feedback or incidents appropriately.

**Public Trust and Delegation**  
Ethical practice builds public trust and enables safe delegation within orthodontic teams.

15



## Patient Safety and Raising Concerns

**Duty to Raise Concerns**  
Orthodontic therapists must identify and report risks like appliance breakages or treatment complications promptly.

**Regulatory Expectations**  
The GDC mandates speaking up when patient safety is at risk to ensure high standards of care.

**Supportive Culture**  
Creating an open culture encourages learning and continuous improvement in orthodontic practice safety.

16



## Audit, CPD, and Governance

**Clinical Governance Engagement**  
Orthodontic therapists participate in clinical governance activities to ensure quality improvement and high standards of care.

**Continuing Professional Development**  
Therapists complete CPD relevant to their practice, including clinical skills, communication, and patient safety.

**Supporting Professionalism**  
Active participation in governance reflects commitment to professionalism and maintaining high care standards.

17



## Teamworking in Orthodontics

**Multidisciplinary Collaboration**  
Orthodontic care depends on teamwork among diverse professionals to provide effective treatment and improve patient outcomes.

**Role Clarity and Communication**  
Clear roles and good communication enhance team efficiency and ensure safe, coordinated orthodontic care delivery.

**Scope of Practice Understanding**  
Knowing each member's skills and limits prevents role confusion and optimizes orthodontic service performance.

18

## Legal Framework



**Professional Regulation**  
Orthodontic therapy is governed by professional regulations ensuring practitioners meet required standards.

**Consent Law**  
Obtaining informed consent from patients is a legal obligation in orthodontic practice.

**Health and Safety Legislation**  
Health and safety laws protect patients and practitioners in clinical orthodontic environments.

**Compliance and Consequences**  
Non-compliance with GDC standards and scope of practice can lead to legal and professional repercussions.

19

## MCQ: Diagnosis



**Role Limitation of Therapists**  
Orthodontic therapists cannot independently diagnose malocclusions and must work within their professional scope.

**Diagnosis vs Treatment**  
Distinguishing diagnosis from treatment delivery is essential for ethical orthodontic practice.

**Working Under Prescription**  
Orthodontic therapists work under prescription, following professional guidelines and regulations like the GDC.

20

## MCQ Answer: Diagnosis



**Diagnosis Responsibility**  
Only dentists registered with the GDC are authorized to diagnose malocclusion.



**Orthodontic Therapists' Role**  
Orthodontic therapists provide treatment under dentist prescription within their professional scope.



**Patient Safety and Compliance**  
Working within defined limits maintains patient safety and adheres to professional standards.

21

## MCQ: Appliance Placement



**Orthodontic Appliance Placement**  
Placing fixed orthodontic appliances like brackets and archwires requires specific training and authorization.

**Role of Clinical Supervision**  
Supervision by licensed orthodontists ensures safe and effective appliance placement by therapists.

**Prescription and Delegation**  
Delegation of orthodontic tasks must be accompanied by proper prescription and oversight.

22

## MCQ Answer: Appliance Placement



**Role of Orthodontic Therapists**  
Therapists can place brackets and archwires as part of orthodontic treatment under specified conditions.

**Prescription Requirement**  
Bracket and archwire placement must be performed under a dentist's prescription to ensure proper treatment planning.

**Supervision Importance**  
Appropriate dental supervision is essential to maintain safety and effectiveness during appliance placement.

23

## SAQ: Supervision



- **Direct Supervision Defined**
  - Direct supervision requires the supervisor to be physically present during the procedure, ensuring immediate oversight and guidance.
- **Indirect Supervision Defined**
  - Indirect supervision allows the supervisor to be offsite but available for consultation, relying on delegated tasks and trust in team members.
- **Importance of Safety**
  - Both supervision types emphasize patient safety by ensuring proper delegation and adherence to protocols within the orthodontic team.
- **Professional Accountability**
  - Supervision maintains professional accountability by clearly defining roles and responsibilities among orthodontic team members.

24



### SAQ Answer: Supervision

**Direct Supervision**  
Prescribing dentist is physically present and able to intervene during the procedure if needed.

**Indirect Supervision**  
Dentist is not present but available for advice and support remotely during the procedure.

**Supervision Decision Factors**  
Level of supervision depends on task complexity, patient condition, and therapist competence.

25

### Key Take-Home Messages



**Role of Orthodontic Therapists**  
Orthodontic therapists are skilled professionals delivering orthodontic treatment under defined scope and prescription.

**Scope and Regulation**  
The GDC clearly defines the scope of practice ensuring safe, effective, and regulated orthodontic care delivery.

**Importance of Teamwork**  
Safe delegation and effective teamworking protect patients and optimise orthodontic therapy outcomes.

**Supervision and Professionalism**  
Clear supervision, communication, and professionalism are essential for maximising benefits in orthodontic services.

26