



June 10, 2013

Lee M. Jameson, D.D.S., M.S., F.A.C.P.
President, American College of Prosthodontists
Diplomate, American Board of Prosthodontics
211 E. Chicago Ave., Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Dr. Jameson:

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns regarding the employment estimates for Prosthodontists as published by Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Program at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). As requested in your letter dated June 3, 2013, I will provide a short summary of the OES survey methodology used to produce the OES estimates and highlight some of the aspects of the methodology that might be responsible for the differences between the OES and American Dental Association (ADA) employment estimates for prosthodontists.

The OES survey is an establishment based survey that produces employment and wage estimates by occupation for a variety of area, industry, and ownership levels. The OES estimates are based on a sample of approximately 1.2 million establishments surveyed over a three year period. The OES sample is drawn from a frame of approximately 6.7 million in-scope nonfarm establishments that file unemployment insurance (UI) reports to their state workforce agencies.

This means that the OES program is unable to include self-employed workers and owners of unincorporated establishments in its estimates. The OES program does include owners of incorporated establishments in the estimates. The Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that about 24% of dentists were self-employed in unincorporated establishments. Although the percent of self-employment for prosthodontists may be different, self-employment would likely explain a large part of the difference between the OES and ADA estimates for prosthodontists.

We are not able to review the methods used in the American Dental Association (ADA) report referenced in your letter, as the report is not available without cost to non-ADA members. However, the [Health, United States, 2012](#) report from the National Center for Health Statistics contains Table 103 listing the number of "professionally active" dentists by state. This table contains data from the same ADA source. The table note states that "Professionally active dentist occupation categories include active practitioners (full- or part-time); dental school faculty or staff; armed forces dentists; government-employed dentists at the federal, state, or local levels; graduate students/interns and residents; and other health or dental organization staff members." As indicated below, this group includes individuals who would not be classified as

dentists in the OES survey based on the work performed. Also OES includes only civilian workers, and thus excludes prosthodontists in the Armed Forces.

The OES survey uses the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system to classify workers into one of about 820 different SOC occupations. Each worker is assigned to an SOC occupation based on work performed, and not by their licensing or education background. For example, a trained prosthodontist teaching at a university or dental school would be coded as a postsecondary health specialties teacher in the OES estimates, not as a prosthodontist. When workers perform work that covers more than one SOC occupation, they are coded in the occupation that requires the highest level of skill. If there is no measurable difference in skill requirements, workers are coded in the occupation in which they spend the most time. For example, dentists that both construct oral prosthesis and perform surgery to improve function or appearance might be reported as oral and maxillofacial surgeons. Finally, all dentists in the federal government, regardless of specialty, are reported as "All other dentists."

The majority of the OES data are collected using mail survey forms, although phone, email, and electronic collection are also used. The survey instructions sent to the sample establishments include the SOC coding guidelines described above.

For the May 2012 estimates, OES sampled over 6,400 of the over 127,000 establishments in the offices of dentists industry (NAICS 621210), and had a response rate among these establishments of about 85%. Because the OES estimates are based on a sample of establishments, and not a census, the OES estimates have sampling variation associated with them. The OES program publishes the relative standard error (RSE) with each estimate as a measure of the sampling variation associated with the estimate.

I hope the information described above helps in your understanding of the methodology behind the OES estimates and addresses your concerns. A much more detailed OES survey methodology description can be found on the OES website at http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/methods_statement.pdf.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dixie Sommers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Dixie Sommers
Assistant Commissioner
Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections