



The Dental Hygienist in Research: Progress over 100 Years

In 1966, an article was published in the *Journal of the American Dental Hygienists' Association* titled, "The Role of the Dental Hygienist in Dental Research."¹ The paper was authored by two dental hygienists with master's degrees and a dentist, all from the School of Dental Hygiene and the Division of Stomatology, School of Dental and Oral Surgery at Columbia University in New York. Although the program is no longer in existence, Columbia University was the first school to offer a Master of Science Degree in Dental Hygiene. Approximately one-third of the curriculum was devoted to research.² We have had many distinguished leaders in our profession who graduated from that institution. It represented the first graduate program, followed by many who recognized the importance of preparing dental hygienists for expanded roles in research and scholarship.

The article mentioned above stresses the need to prepare dental hygienists in research. "As a professional health worker, the dental hygienist has an obligation to assist the dental profession in providing the best possible care for the public. This obligation may be further fulfilled through research endeavor. The dental hygienist working in both basic and applied research may serve as either an assistant or as an administrator. What qualifies the dental hygienist for work in dental research? Her educational background which more than adequately prepares her in basic dental and clinical sciences and her license to work, under the supervisions of the dentist, directly in the mouth of the patient or subject. In addition to these qualifications, various of the following attributes will be found of considerable value: a keen imagination, excellent powers of observation, a sincere interest in the process of scientific investigation, the ability to search the literature, to design experiments, carry out the protocol, record and tabulate the data, and prepare the results (written in scientific style) for publication."

Fast forward to 2013, and you will see how far we have come in developing dental hygienists for a role in oral health research. The *Journal of Dental Hygiene* is full of papers that represent significant research conducted by dental hygienists who are contributing to our National Agenda for Dental Hygiene Research. In the current issue of the *JDH*, you will see papers representing scholarship from the U.S. and abroad. Authors are dental hygienists, dentists and physicians, dental and dental hygiene administrators and scientists with doctoral degrees. Subject areas in the current issue of the *JDH* represent emerging science in the areas of Bisphosphonate Associated Osteonecrosis, oral health behaviors, service learning and dental materials.

I am also pleased to see included in this issue the first published study by a dental hygienist on the topic of sleep apnea. Sleep Apnea and Sleep Medicine is an emerging area of science in dentistry. In the future, dental hygienists may play a large role in the assessment and referral of patients who test at high risk for the condition.

In 1930, Evelyn Gunnarson, DH wrote an article titled, "The Dental Hygienist, Past, Present and Future." The final paragraph includes a quote from Dr. Alfred C. Fones who said "Every dental hygienist must have her mind open to everything that is progressive." Well, our profession has seen much progress in the area of research and scholarship in the last 100 years! We must keep the progress going!³

Sincerely,

Rebecca Wilder, RDH, BS, MS
Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Dental Hygiene*

References

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