

The Impact of Leadership and Research on Decision Making: Leading Through Research



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The past 5 years have been exciting and critical for the dental hygiene profession. It started when ADHA requisitioned an environmental scan that revealed an opportunity to move the profession in a new direction that provide for more leadership opportunities and roles for dental hygienists.¹ Subsequent to this scan, the ADHA board of trustees developed a bold and comprehensive strategic plan that is designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

To support the objectives and goals of ADHA the National Dental Hygiene Research Agenda (NDHRA) needed to be updated. The last revision was in 2007, well before the changes started to happen within ADHA, the educational system, and clinical practice. The current revision of the NDHRA was designed to support the core ideology to lead the transformation of the dental hygiene profession, the vision that dental hygienists are integrated into the healthcare delivery system and the values of service, collaboration, quality, community, lifelong learning and ethics.

One of the first steps was to read other dental hygiene research agendas. Surprisingly, the U.S. and Canada are the only dental hygiene associations with a research agenda. Other disciplines have research agendas such as like nursing, dentistry and physician assistants. Research agendas from other healthcare disciplines were reviewed to see where dental hygiene research could have an impact. A research agenda helps:

- Balance internal and external influences to make good decisions
- Provides a capacity to influence clinical practice and public policy
- Provides the next generation of questions that will advance the science of dental hygiene
- Focus funding in research topics that will help make informed decision about initiatives for the future

This update was accomplished by collaboration with researchers, educators and leaders in dental hygiene. A thorough review of past NDHRA and articles was conducted. It allowed the council to understand the development of the first agenda and the reasons for updates over the years. Once that was completed it was time to critically review key documents includ-

ing “Dental Hygiene at the Crossroads of Change” and “Transforming Dental Hygiene Education and the Profession for the 21st Century.”^{1,2} These 2 documents helped in identifying the current key priorities and also to develop a document that could be used by educators, researchers and clinicians.

The idea to develop a conceptual research model was predicated on providing a document that could be utilized by educators who teach research concepts at all levels, graduate students and novice researchers. Experienced researchers may also use this when mentoring junior faculty and new researchers.

The model breaks down the areas of dental hygiene research into three categories: professional development, client level, and population level. The model also shows the phases of research. This is reflected in the conceptual model as discovery, testing/evaluation, and dissemination/translation.

There are many research questions and areas of research that are needed to support the continual development of the dental hygiene discipline. However, based on ADHA’s strategic plan there were 5 priorities that researchers are encouraged to explore:³

1. Differences between baccalaureate- and associate-level educated dental hygienists
2. The impact of dental hygiene mid-level practitioners on oral health outcomes.
3. Development and testing of conceptual models distinct to dental hygiene that will guide education, practice and research.
4. Efficacy of preventive interventions across the lifespan including oral health behaviors.
5. Patient outcomes in varying delivery systems that may include cost effectiveness, workforce models, telehealth, access to care, and direct access.

Focus on these priorities has the potential to accelerate the pace of transformation of the profession to improve the public’s oral and overall health. Also, within these priority areas are research questions

that will impact the future of the profession and the direction of ADHA.

This revised research agenda is intended to guide researchers, educators, clinicians and students in advancing the profession through research by generating new knowledge within the discipline. It provides a visual framework for conceptualizing how individual research topics address ADHA priorities. Dental hygiene research and researchers are necessary, relevant and integral to our future.

Sincerely,

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REFERENCES

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