

Guest Editorial

Collaboration During a Global Health Crisis



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A major determinant of how organizations manage crises like the COVID-19 pandemic is the ability to collaborate. Organizations need to pull together experts with unique, cross-functional perspectives to solve rapidly changing, complex problems that have long-term implications to their associations and the professions they represent. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of oral health care services by dental hygienists and dentists. As a result, the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) and the American Dental Association (ADA), have demonstrated organizational agility and adaptability to support their respective professions in managing the crises. In order to make sound decisions quickly (agility) and make recommendations for change (adaptability) the first step is to collect data from oral health care professionals. Ongoing research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with the important opportunity to learn not only about the COVID-19 virus itself, but how oral health care providers are being impacted by the pandemic and adapting to a much different professional environment.

The ADHA and the ADA Health Policy Institute (ADA HPI) have recently collaborated to study the prevalence of COVID-19 among dental hygienists in the United States, the infection prevention and control procedures and associated trends in mental health, and dental hygienists' employment patterns, as well as their attitudes toward working as dental hygienists during a pandemic. The ADHA – ADA collaborative research endeavor is the *first study* of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on dental hygienists in the United

States (US). Important questions were asked regarding the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), compliance with national guidance, avoidance of aerosol generating procedures, rates of anxiety, depression, and employment patterns impacting the overall dental hygiene workforce. Understanding the multifactorial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the dental hygiene community is essential for organizational responses and planning to support the dental hygiene community, in addition to workforce assessment and analysis.

There are so many lessons to be learned from this pandemic and we will surely continue to learn more over time. However, what I would say first, is that there is no single best or perfect response strategy to this pandemic. As the organization representing the interests of dental hygienists across the country, ADHA's response to the pandemic may need to change over time, but monitoring, learning, and adapting are key. Professional associations are being called upon to be stable in a very uncertain environment, but also to remain agile and adaptable as the further data becomes available. Adaptability in our current environment requires new forms of collaboration, shared decision-making, and accountability. The COVID-19 pandemic provided the ADHA and the ADA the unique and timely opportunity to collaborate through a research lens to assess the impact of the pandemic on our respective professions. As members of the oral health care team, dental hygienists and dentists are well-poised to demonstrate agility and adaptability through these uncertain times for better health outcomes for the public we serve.

We will continue to collect data in collaboration with the ADA HPI. We will also have the opportunity to share our ongoing findings through webinars co-sponsored by the ADHA and the ADA. It is clear that a wide range of response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic will be needed as we move forward into year two. ADHA has made a commitment to knowledge-based decision making and this important research will enable us to stand by our commitment the oral health care professionals we represent and the public we serve.

The ADHA and ADA HPI research teams deserve special recognition and a great deal of appreciation for their important work. Together, we have created the two important manuscripts in this issue of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*. JoAnn Gurenlian, led the ADHA efforts along with Cameron Estrich, Marko Vujicic, and Marcelo Araujo from the American Dental Association. I am continually humbled by their expertise and honored to have participated in this research collaboration. The dental hygienists who volunteered to be a part of this groundbreaking research in this unique time in history deserve the recognition and collective appreciation from their professional peers and ADHA. Without their input and sharing of their experiences, these studies would not be possible. Your commitment to the profession, and the public that we serve, particularly during these unprecedented times, makes me proud to serve you in my role as ADHA Chief Executive Officer.

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