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Guest Editorial

Honoring Our Legacy While Shaping Our Future: 100 Years of Dental Hygiene Research

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October is a special month for the dental hygiene profession. As we celebrate National Dental Hygiene Month, we recognize the essential contributions dental hygienists make to the health and well-being of individuals and communities. This October carries even greater significance as the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* celebrates its centennial year. I am especially honored to serve as the 100th President of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) during this landmark year for our profession's scholarly publication.

These milestones invite us to reflect on where our profession has been, on how far we have come, and what we will carry forward for the generations who follow.

One hundred years of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* is more than a milestone; it represents a century of curiosity, scholarship, perseverance, and growth. For generations, the journal has provided a place for dental hygienists to share knowledge, examine evidence, and contribute to the scientific foundation of our discipline.[1-3]

When the first issue of *The Journal of the American Dental Hygienists' Association* was published in January 1927, dental hygiene research was just getting started. The inaugural issue was 16 pages and contained no research studies. Instead, it reflected a young profession finding its voice and creating a forum for sharing information about dental hygiene practice and defining the role of this new auxiliary within dentistry.[1,2]

The evolution of our profession since then has been extraordinary. As dental hygiene has matured, so has its scholarly identity. Graduate education and an expanding research infrastructure have created opportunities for dental hygienists to become investigators, educators, and scholars. The scope of inquiry has expanded from prevention and clinical practice to periodontal care, education, public health, infection prevention, patient behaviors, workforce development, access to care, and the connections between oral and systemic health.[2,3]

When I look across this history, what stands out to me most is not simply how much we have learned. It is the willingness of dental hygienists to ask *"What if?"*

- What if we approach prevention differently?
- What if we look beyond the mouth?
- What if we question a practice simply because it has always been done a certain way?

Progress begins with questions. Research allows us to move from what we believe to what we can demonstrate. For a century, the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* has given our profession a place to investigate those questions and share what we have learned.[2,3]

Standing at the intersection of our history and our future, I am reminded every day of the extraordinary breadth of talent, knowledge, and passion within our profession. Dental hygienists are advancing research, educating future practitioners, improving clinical care, serving their communities, developing innovative models of care, and advocating for policies that expand access to oral health services.

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The research landscape ahead will undoubtedly look different from the earliest issues of the journal. Artificial intelligence, digital health, teledentistry, advanced diagnostics, precision prevention, microbiome research, and data analytics are influencing contemporary health care and creating new possibilities for dental hygiene research. Future discoveries will introduce technologies and approaches we cannot yet fully anticipate.

Technology will not be the only force shaping our profession. Some of our most important challenges remain deeply human.

- How do we address persistent oral health inequities?
- How do we strengthen the connection between oral health and the broader health care system?
- How do we ensure that the evidence we generate reaches the patients and communities who need it most?

Answering these questions will require us to look beyond traditional boundaries. Collaboration among dental hygienists, dentists, physicians, researchers, educators, behavioral scientists, public health professionals, and other disciplines can strengthen our science and broaden our understanding of the challenges facing our patients and communities.[3] Just as important, we must ensure that the voices and lived experiences of patients and communities inform the questions we ask and the solutions we pursue.

Research is not the responsibility of researchers alone. Clinicians can identify meaningful questions arising from practice. Educators can cultivate curiosity and research literacy. Students can bring fresh perspectives and challenge established thinking. Researchers can pursue gaps in knowledge. Leaders can create environments where inquiry, innovation, and scholarship are valued. Every dental hygienist can engage with research by critically evaluating evidence and incorporating sound findings into clinical practice.[2-4]

As we celebrate National Dental Hygiene Month and 100 years of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*, let us honor the researchers, clinicians, educators, students, and leaders whose work brought us to this moment. Let us read the literature of the past not only with appreciation, but with curiosity about what it can teach us about what comes next.

Looking across our communities, I am reminded that each generation is entrusted with both a legacy and a responsibility. We inherit the knowledge, discoveries, and accomplishments of those who came before us. We also inherit the responsibility to question, explore, and build something stronger for those who will follow.

One hundred years ago, we were still searching for our place in health care. Today, we have a profession and clinical practices that are based on scientific evidence, a growing community of scholars, and the opportunity to help define our future. The first century of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* gave us a foundation built on curiosity, evidence, and a commitment to improving the health of those we serve. The next century is ours to shape by having the courage to ask what comes next.

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