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Thankfully, some things never change

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I am so thankful that some things never change. This may sound strange coming from me, since I am usually a strong advocate for change, and am always looking for better ways to do things. Interestingly, these are two of the essential characteristics of dental hygienists and of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) that have not changed since our profession began. These and other characteristics of dental hygienists and ADHA were highly visible during the 2005 ADHA annual session. Let me share my observations with you, and discuss why I believe it may be best for some things to remain the same.

Dental hygienists are the most cheerful, futuristic-thinking, caring people I know. They really enjoy their professional practice, regardless of the setting. The vast majority are clinical practitioners who work every day in practices across the country serving the oral health needs of diverse clientele. Many others have used their basic dental hygiene professional degree to great advantage in forging careers in related areas other than clinical practice. Whatever the practice setting, dental hygienists are proud of their professional credential and are enthusiastic about their future. This is common to all dental hygienists and has not changed since I've been observing them as a group.

Dental hygienists who are active in the regulatory arena are very special people, especially those who continue their work year after year. ADHA supports such work throughout the year in individual states through its Division of Governmental Affairs. Once a year, the ADHA governmental affairs division hosts an open meeting during the annual session program to provide constituent legislative chairs and others the opportunity to share common experiences, challenges, goals, strategies, and successful and unsuccessful outcomes of legislative activities, as well as to explore possibilities for the next legislative session. Members of the ADHA governmental affairs division staff are always present to provide encouragement, insight, and guidance; and to offer assistance when requested. The collective enthusiasm of the people who attend these meetings is inspiring and contagious. Regardless of the losses experienced in the previous legislative sessions, or the negative outcomes in generating support among constituent dental hygienists, the dental hygienists who are legislative leaders never give up and are always eager to prepare for the next legislative session. This commitment among dental

hygienists to change state laws to increase access to oral health care for underserved populations and to improve delivery of oral health care is one thing that I hope will never change. The legislative changes that have been made in individual states through the combined efforts of a few dedicated dental hygienists continue to inspire the rest of us. I still marvel at how some dental hygienists can suffer defeat in their state's legislature one year and get up and prepare to work again for change during the next legislative session. Time after time, this characteristic of dental hygienists never changes.

Dental hygiene educators are another group that never changes. Only the issues that concern them change. In recognition of these issues, ADHA sets a time in each annual session schedule for educators to enjoy a program and to visit with one another, sharing ideas and discussing concerns. These annual session programs may be well attended because all educators must continually work to prepare professional entry-level students for future practice within the time and credit-hour limits determined by the institutions in which they are located, regardless of the degree granted. Those teaching in institutions that grant dental hygiene baccalaureate and postgraduate degrees face other challenges, such as ensuring that the curriculum meets academic standards that allow dental hygiene courses to transfer for admission to master's degree programs. Furthermore, faculty in dental hygiene master's degree programs are challenged to admit and graduate enough dental hygienists with advanced degrees to fill the growing need in education, research, administration, and areas of employment yet unknown. Despite these challenges and others resulting from factors such as accreditation standards, institutional requirements, professional practice requirements, limited funding, limited faculty, and less than desirable facilities, dental hygiene educators remain committed to the task and excited about the future of their profession. As a group, dental hygiene educators are enthusiastic about their role in the profession, and about the future of their profession. After being one of them for nearly 30 years, I'm convinced that, as a group, they never change. For that, we can all be thankful indeed.

I am thankful that, in many respects, the ADHA annual session does not change from year to year. Even the program remains so similar each year that people can plan far in advance because they generally have come to expect certain meetings and social events to be scheduled on the same days during the meeting. It must be working, because attendance continues to increase each year. People come to take advantage of the continuing education courses, enjoy the social events, visit with old friends, take care of association business, see the products, and learn from their colleagues. The 2005 annual session held in Las Vegas was well attended and highly successful. I expect the 2006 meeting in Orlando will be even better because people will likely view it as an opportunity for a family vacation and will bring their children to see Disney World. Yes, the ADHA annual session schedule has become so successful that it might be a good idea for it to stay the same until an obviously better one is proposed.

Dental hygienists continue to conduct research, write reports, and submit them for publication in refereed journals, such as the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*. The spark of curiosity that ignites scientific investigation is growing for our profession and is being encouraged by the funds that are now more readily available for it. Dental hygiene researchers still swim upstream, so to speak, regarding research in general. Yet, they continue to swim! I believe they show great tenacity and enduring will to succeed in a highly competitive arena. Thank goodness their will to compete hasn't changed over the past 30 to 40 years. The commitment of a few has kept the spark of dental hygiene research alive.

I'm thankful that every time there is a need to develop a special plan for some aspect of our future, or to react to some present or future threat, talented dental hygienists volunteer and accept the challenge. Often, these volunteer jobs are difficult and thankless and require many hours of hard work. Yet people step forth to the task without fail. I trust this will never change because this characteristic makes our volunteer association work.

I could go on and on with this list of things that never change and should never change, and I'm sure you could add your own to mine. I've given you enough examples for you to do so if you wish. I love dental hygiene, the fact that we change when we need to, and the fact that we remain the same in the characteristics that are uniquely ours. I guess our continuing challenge will be to somehow know when to change and when to stay the course. We've been pretty good at it so far.