



Elevating Dental Hygiene Scholarship in the Future

As we embark upon a monumental year at the American Dental Hygienists' Association, I pause to think about the future of research and scholarship within the profession. Although we have already started the celebration of 100 years of the ADHA, we will formally have a "big party" at the 2013 Center for Lifelong Learning. Research will be part of what we honor about our progress. Many more dental hygienists are involved in research and scholarly activity than just a few years ago. More changes are anticipated for the future as we begin to discuss the possibility of doctoral education in dental hygiene. I remember when we had only a few graduate programs in dental hygiene. Now, we number about 20+ programs, most of them specifically in dental hygiene.

We must have more dental hygienists pursuing graduate degrees if we are to continue the momentum of scholarship in our profession. However, a recent study by Boyd and Bailey found that fear of thesis research is a significant barrier to dental hygienists as they consider graduate studies.¹ This finding is not surprising as most dental hygiene students have little scientific writing experience and few are exposed to the process of research during their undergraduate education. I find this same fear in my own graduate students when they matriculate into our masters program. Once they realize that they will be provided with ideas for research or perhaps be included in an ongoing study, they start to experience less fear. When they discover that they will have a thesis committee who will mentor them and guide them through the process, they start to get encouraged. By the time they complete the data collection, analyze the results, defend the thesis, present the project at a scientific meeting and write it up and submit it to the graduate school, they are delighted! And when they finally see their paper in print in a scientific journal, they are ecstatic, proud beyond belief... and ready to do more! Writing the

thesis research and publishing it in a peer reviewed scientific journal like the Journal of Dental Hygiene is key to moving our profession forward and cultivating a new generation of scholars.

Another trend we are observing is the rise in numbers of dental hygienists who are pursuing doctoral degrees. I anticipate that we will have a doctoral program in dental hygiene in the near future. The advantage of doctoral programs is that they have the potential to educate professionals who have a solid base in scientific inquiry and thus can contribute to the scholarly process of the profession. My hope is that the doctoral programs in dental hygiene will have rigorous requirements for research and writing, culminating in a dissertation that is later formatted for publication in our scientific journal!

As we celebrate 100 years of the ADHA, we realize how far we have come in a short 100 years and where we want to go in the future. A profession is defined by having its own body of knowledge that culminates in dissemination to the world. You have a wonderful resource in the Journal of Dental Hygiene. It is a visible display of our research and scholarship and it is growing each year! I will close with a question for you: How will you contribute to the growth of scholarship for the profession?

Sincerely,

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References

1. Boyd LD, Bailey A. Dental hygienists' perceptions of barriers to graduate education. *J Dent Educ.* 2011;75(8):1030-1037.