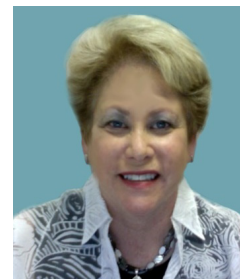


Editorial

Ann Eshenaur Spolarich, RDH, PhD; Jane L. Forrest, RDH, EdD

The Value of Dental Hygiene Research Conferences



The National Center for Dental Hygiene Research & Practice (NCDHRP) is pleased to announce the upcoming 3rd North American/Global Dental Hygiene Research Conference, "Beyond the Boundaries: Discovery, Innovation and Transformation," on October 16 through 18, 2014 in Bethesda, Maryland. This is the third major conference hosted by our organization.^{1,2} In addition to our major conferences, the NCDHRP hosts regional conferences to disseminate knowledge about significant oral health topics and the delivery of oral health care services. We invite you to read several papers from the conference, "Advances in Practice," which are published in this issue of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*.

It is essential that members of the dental hygiene research community join together to purposefully address the oral health objectives prioritized by our respective professional organizations. Dental hygienists must work together to gather information in a logical and structured manner in order to have the scientific database capability to answer important oral health research questions to improve patient care outcomes. A collaborative model allows researchers to maximize the utilization of limited resources and to share expertise for developing strategies to study common global oral health problems.

A coordinated effort also will promote contributions to the literature that add to the unique body of knowledge needed for the growth of the profession. Further, this knowledge will be based on sound scientific research that translates to an evidence-based approach to dental hygiene education and practice. The growth of the profession through published research is a critical aspect of professionalization, and enables those outside of the profession to learn about efforts made in meeting oral health objectives. Research conferences are important vehicles to bring members of the global dental hygiene community together to share their efforts in these activities, receive training, build new skills and discuss strategies for moving the profession forward.

Dental hygiene theory and practice must be based on sound research and scientific information. A research infrastructure provides the organization and resources that enable both the systematic and pur-

poseful building of a rigorous body of knowledge.^{3,4} A research infrastructure fosters the development and advancement of long-term research programs, enables discussion and dissemination of research findings, and supports the systematic building of a scientific knowledge base that informs practice. There are 5 essential and interrelated elements of a research infrastructure:

- A critical mass of researchers/scientists
- Research priorities that produce clinically relevant knowledge
- Communication systems that promote linkages among researchers and increase access to research findings
- Funding mechanisms to support research
- Demonstrated value for research and its relationship to practice^{3,4}

Research conferences play a significant role in bringing together the growing critical mass of dental hygiene researchers, who are dispersed geographically and across a multitude of diverse employment settings throughout North America and abroad. Conferences enable dental hygienists from academia, industry, government, public health and clinical practice to network and share their interests to help each other better address the significant oral health needs of the public. It is a logical and cost-effective strategy to engage more dental hygienists in oral health research, as they possess expertise in health prevention and behavioral change, and because so many are already working with underserved and underrepresented populations using many different models of care delivery. Conferences facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, prioritization of research pathways and funding strategies, and dissemination of funding opportunities to support projects. Identifying and securing funding is an essential element to building a research infrastructure. Establishing relationships through shared commonalities and research interests results in partnerships which broaden the efforts of dental hygiene investigators through intra- and interprofessional collaboration. Thus, research conferences support the socialization of the profession around its scientific base and other essential components of a successful research infrastructure.

Recommendations for Future Research Activities

In order to systematically and purposefully advance our oral health research efforts, we suggest that the global dental hygiene research community consider the following recommendations for achieving common objectives:

- **Recommendation #1:** Initiate long-range planning to guide research efforts and to promote the continued development of a unique body of knowledge for the profession.
- **Recommendation #2:** Create a database of researchers, proposed investigations, research in progress, and completed research in order to monitor ongoing efforts, and to exchange ideas for future research.
- **Recommendation #3:** Educate dental hygienists to evaluate the scope, quality, merit and utility of research studies used to guide evidence-based practice.
- **Recommendation #4:** Utilize national oral health and dental hygiene research agendas as the driving forces behind the primary work efforts of our professional organizations to support the objectives of our respective strategic plans.
- **Recommendation #5:** Create opportunities for faculty to share effective strategies for teaching and mentoring novice researchers.
- **Recommendation #6:** Increase the number and preparation of dental hygiene researchers.
- **Recommendation #7:** Utilize our graduate dental hygiene programs as a resource to assist in our efforts to accomplish the objectives set forth by our research agendas.
- **Recommendation #8:** Work collaboratively within the global dental hygiene community to generate ideas for targeted research projects,

and to identify researchers and potential sources of funding.

- **Recommendation #9:** Host research conferences on a regular basis to facilitate networking, sharing and disseminating research findings, and keeping current with trends and innovations.

Dental hygiene research conferences contribute to strengthening the infrastructure critical for the growth of our profession. The small community of dental hygiene researchers, coupled with the limited availability of funds and competitive nature of grant awards, requires a careful examination of and consensus as to how to move forward with our plans for research. Clearly, a coordinated, viable structure for the conduct of research will allow for maximum gains in attaining and disseminating new knowledge that will ultimately translate into practice.^{3,4} We invite all members of the dental hygiene community to participate in these conferences, as our collective input is essential for advancing the profession.

Sincerely,

Ann Eshenaur Spolarich, RDH, PhD
Clinical Associate Professor, Division of Dental Public Health and Pediatric Dentistry; and
Associate Director, National Center for Dental Hygiene Research & Practice
Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

Jane L. Forrest, RDH, EdD
Professor of Clinical Dentistry and Section Chair, Behavioral Science
Division of Dental Public Health and Pediatric Dentistry; and
Director, National Center for Dental Hygiene Research & Practice
Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

References

1. Forrest JL, Spolarich AE. Conference Overview and Acknowledgment. Proceedings from the 2nd North American/Global Dental Hygiene Research Conference, Bethesda, Maryland; October 2011. *J Dent Hyg.* 2012;86(1):4-5.
2. Forrest JL, Spolarich AE. Conference Overview and Acknowledgment. Proceedings from the North American Dental Hygiene Research Conference, Bethesda, Maryland; June, 2009. *J Dent Hyg.* 2009;83(4):151,155.
3. Forrest JL, Gitlin LN. A commitment to excellence in practice through a research infrastructure. *J Dent Hyg.* 1996;70:4-6.
4. Forrest JL, Spolarich AE. Building a research infrastructure. *J Dent Hyg.* 2010;84(1):11-13.