

Editorial

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Beyond the Boundaries: Discovery, Innovation and Transformation Through Collaboration

The 3rd North American/Global Dental Hygiene Research Conference, held in October in Bethesda, Maryland, was a resounding success. It certainly held true to its mandate to go beyond boundaries, with dental hygienists from 13 countries participating as presenters and as attendees. Discovery, innovation, and transformation were around every corner of the conference venue and in every workshop. But the spirit that animated those conceptual goals was one of collaboration.

Nowhere was this intention observed more explicitly than at the pre-conference working meetings of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association's Research Advisory Committee and the National Center for Dental Hygiene Research and Practice. After daylong separate meetings to revise, develop, and discuss respective strategic plans and research priorities, the groups came together with representatives of the International Federation of Dental Hygienists as well as members of the American Dental Hygienists' Association Council on Research. This meeting of national and international minds resulted in a sharing of research agendas and visions of future research focus for our dental hygiene profession.

The collective research meeting also resulted in the recognition that our dental hygiene organizations share essentially common interests and goals. Of no surprise, global areas of concern include oral cancer, tobacco cessation, infection control, and health care for aging populations. Yet we also continue to discover, and confirm, more and more oral—systemic links that will have profound effects on the health care professions in general. Consensus appears to be that research strategies should be both patient/client centred and population focused. Core professional education and continuing development, including augmented training in research, are also considered of high importance.

The impact of this discovery of commonalities was immediate. What followed in the meeting was a brainstorming of ways that our common research efforts could be not only shared, but also collected in a more central manner. Participants acknowledged that, although the dental hygiene research community is relatively small, it is growing. Coordinating our research in a purposeful way could advance our efforts maximally using the minimum resources that are available. Working collaboratively, not in independent silos, just makes sense if we hope to realize our ambitious agendas. To open lines of communication and promote cooperation it was agreed that meeting together more often would be ideal; with social technology, that shouldn't be too difficult! Suggestions were made about exploring the possibilities of accessing a common research portal for reference and resources to help fulfill this dream of active sharing and collaboration. We await the exciting new opportunities that may come of this first brief get-together.

Not only does research give rise to clinical results in the way of improved treatment, better materials, and advanced applications of technology, but it also has a social impact—on access to care, education, and public and private policies on oral health. The Bethesda conference brought together like minds who reiterated the value of such achievements and confirmed that the world is indeed small. As oral health professionals, we have much in common in our research visions; what was made clear at this conference was that together we are stronger. Here's to a future of continuing the discovery, innovation, and transformation through global collaboration.

Sincerely,

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