

Guest Editorial

Continued Collaboration in a Global Pandemic



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This issue of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* highlights another landmark moment of collaborative research between the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) and the American Dental Association (ADA) Health Policy Institute (HPI). One year ago, our organizations shared the results of two key research studies related to the COVID-19 pandemic; trends in dental hygiene employment and infection control practices among dental hygienists. Since that time, the ADHA and ADA HPI have continued to study both dental hygienists and dentists, gathering additional trend data as well as information about vaccination intention and hesitancy. Three papers summarizing the key data on infection prevention and control practices, dental hygiene employment patterns and vaccine intention and hesitancy of dental hygienists are published in this issue, highlighting what we have learned from over 7,000 of our dental hygiene colleagues.

Throughout this year-long study, we have been fortunate to learn many things. First, the journey of a pandemic has taught us that dental hygienists are both brave and resilient health care providers. Our colleagues have had to make a wide range of difficult decisions, none of which were taken lightly, and all of which have had a profound impact, both professionally and personally.

We have also witnessed changes to the dental hygiene workforce. Results from our research have shown that career trajectories, salaries, infection control protocols, and patient care procedures have been changing since the beginning of the pandemic. We would never have known this story without the thousands of participants who were willing to share their experiences every four to six weeks, for an entire year. We are grateful to every

individual who chose to be part of this process. If you were involved in this study, you should be proud of your legacy and the body of knowledge that you helped to build!

Science can also be a teacher. The process of conducting research and discovering answers to the critical questions impacting the profession is an enlightening experience. We may think that we can anticipate a particular response in the scientific inquiry process, but the real learning comes from the results of the research. The results from these studies demonstrate positive changes over the past year, yet there is still more work to be accomplished. Workforce trends are improving as more dental hygienists return to clinical practice. However, infection control practices and procedures are decreasing in some areas, and vaccine hesitancy is apparent amongst some dental hygienists. We must ask ourselves what needs to be done to address these issues, and how can we work together to continue to support safe practices and growth for all dental hygienists?

Lastly, partnership is powerful. We have had the opportunity to work closely with a rich team of research experts at the ADA HPI. The collaborative spirit between our associations has been exceptional. We have shared ideas, resources, and countless hours working on a collective mission of understanding the impact of the pandemic on both dental hygiene and dentistry. This partnership has brought out the best in us—focus, respect, expertise, high level communication, and shared decision-making. We look forward to continuing this collaboration with our esteemed colleagues. This important partnership has enabled us to document the lived experiences of dental hygienists throughout this historic pandemic. By publishing the results of this research in the *JDH*, the historical record of these most challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic will be preserved.

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