

Remembering Ann Battrell: A legacy in leadership

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Much has been written about the recent passing of Ann Battrell, MSDH, FADHA, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), just weeks short of ADHA's 100-year anniversary celebration. The opening session of the ADHA Annual Conference was illuminated with over a thousand phone lights as friends and colleagues celebrated her legacy. Ann was known for her many leadership roles within the ADHA but also reaching far beyond the boundaries of the organization. She devoted her passions, throughout her 23-year tenure at the ADHA, to give dental hygienists voices and seats at many different tables with the goal of advancing the dental hygiene profession and improving the oral health outcomes of the public. Her invaluable experiences as a clinical dental hygienist, dental hygiene educator, graduate student learner, researcher, elected leader, association staff member, and finally as CEO of the ADHA, brought a deep and personal understanding to all she did in leading the organization that represents the interests of over 226,000 dental hygienists in the United States.

Ann's talents as a leader were recognized early in her dental hygiene career. She was described as bright

and bold; smart and sassy; as someone who was able to make hard decisions and accept accountability for those choices. All of these were traits that served her well in her role as ADHA CEO. The dental hygiene profession and the ADHA have greatly benefitted from her willingness to step forward, be a visionary and a risk taker, be able to responsibly use available resources, and to make valuable connections with others in ways too numerous to recount in this tribute.

In the book, *Being Mortal*, surgeon and public health researcher, Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, describes the two unfixables in medicine, aging and dying, realities that we all face as part of living. Gawande goes on to describe how serious health conditions, such as cancer, can bring the question of mortality into sharp focus, giving us the opportunity to set our priorities beyond just surviving. When faced with a serious illness, Ann made the deeply personal decision to continue to do what mattered most to her – continuing her work to advance the dental hygiene profession, while still being a devoted mother, grandmother, daughter, and sister to her family. She made the conscious choice to continue to do the work that gave her great joy – leading the ADHA, until the time came when she was no longer able to work.

Advancing the dental hygiene profession, in all of its diverse aspects, was truly her passion and filled her life with great purpose. We are all the beneficiaries of Ann's precious gift.

Ann was known for a number of sayings that applied to so many aspects of her leadership style and her unwavering approach to life in general. Two that especially resonate are her paraphrase of the author Glennon Doyle, "in life, we can do hard things" and one of her own, "be open to the universe because the universe is trying to guide us." While similar adages have been used to guide our leaders to fearlessly face the challenges of advancing the dental hygiene profession, they also give particular insight to the inner courage it took for Ann to face a difficult diagnosis and still live each day to the fullest.

Ann's life's work was defined by her ability to connect and empower others as a mentor, advisor, colleague, and as a friend. All dental hygienists, in the United States and beyond, have been touched by her tireless work and are encouraged to join the movement to advance the profession, and improve oral health access and outcomes for the public. The lasting impact of her leadership will set the stage for embarking on the next 100 years of the ADHA. Ann Battrell's example of living a courageous and purposeful life, her spirit and her wisdom will never be forgotten.

In Memory of Ann Battrell, MSDH, FADHA
https://www.adha.org/annbattrell_inlovingmemory

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