

## Professional Sacrifice

At 18 years old I was told I need to go to college: That I may need to support myself and a family one day. I was told I should become a dental hygienist; they make good money and I'd likely enjoy working in dentistry. I was not the smartest kid in class-pretty mediocre actually. College was a challenge educationally and socially any excuse not to do homework (dime beer night)! After getting a letter from the Dean that I may lose my government loan if my grades didn't improve; I got down to business. Forward 1 ½ years: married, pregnant, and living thousands of miles from family-times were tough. I completed the pre-reqs that I needed to apply for the DH program and happily, was accepted. The next two years (of horror) - were filled with studying, clinical requirements, and caring for a 3 year old. Lots of stress and many tears later-graduation came. I passed the boards; I got my license in the mail and now I can get a job! I was one of the lucky ones, jobs were plentiful then. I worked part time at first to raise my kids while they were young and for close to 25 years I worked full time. I have worked 30 years in private practice with a good salary and benefits. I have spent thousands of dollars on massage and chiropractic care as well as many hours at the gym to strengthen my body to continue to do what I love, with no regrets. I have also spent thousands of dollars paying dues to my professional organization –ADHA, also with no regrets.

ADHA Membership-ahhh that dirty word. I have been a member for 32 years, beginning as a student. If you are satisfied with your job, pay, benefits, and not worried about your professional future; you are truly blessed. If you want to continue to practice DH as you currently are, and you want to serve the public in possibly new or improved ways, maybe have some unique employment options; then listen up. ADHA is a great way to get required CE's, but we all know there are many resources for those. FB hygiene groups can be our social network, informative, and interesting, but still not a professional organization that has your back. Face to face hygiene meetings, conferences, and CE's provide opportunities to have personal contact, help bring back your passion, and comradery among your peers. Being a member of ADHA is that and so much more, it is OUR voice. They support OUR profession. It is how we keep or improve our standards. It is our assurance that we will have career options and opportunities. It is the organization which protects our interests, ADA does not do that. Jobs, work environment, how we practice, what we can legally do in our state, is dictated by dentists and the dental board. Any changes in the way we practice DH come down to US. We need an organized voice in order to make change and continue as an accredited profession. If we want more options and opportunities to practice, we need to stick together as a team, and with the help of an organization that has shown some powerful advocacy efforts.

The following is a list of examples of the efforts of ADHA and dedicated members who work for legislative and rules changes that were brought about by organized dental hygiene. There ain't no "genie in the bottle baby"...! The next items weren't magically rubbed into place!

- We can practice under general supervision.
- We can legally apply fluoride and other medicaments.
- We can legally scale subgingivally and curette soft tissue.
- We can legally administer local anesthesia.
- We can provide local anesthetic under general supervision on a patient of record in Arizona.
- We can legally perform public health dental screenings.
- We can legally administer nitrous oxide.

- We can legally perform any procedures dental assistants perform.
- We have expanded the number of hygienists who may simultaneously practice for any dentist.
- We can obtain personal liability insurance covering us for all aspects of legal practice.
- We have preserved the clinical practice of dental hygiene.
- We have preserved the educational standards for dental hygiene practice.
- We have developed a support system for hygienists to conduct research.
- We have developed baccalaureate and master's degree level educational programs so hygienists can advance into public health and other specialties.
- We have dental hygienists contributing to the preparation of WREB's written dental hygiene exam.
- We have hygienists serving as examiners in dental hygiene board exams.
- We have hygienists serving on the State Board of Dental Examiners. Serve on the Dental Hygiene Committee which is overseen by BODEX here in AZ. There are hygienists serving from the four cardinal points of the state.
- We have achieved Expanded Functions & Affiliated Practice.
- We have supported and now have Dental Therapy, and the law states you have to be an RDH first.

There are approximately 4100 licensed dental hygienists practicing in Arizona. Currently we have 148 ADHA members in the Southern component (Southern AzDHA). These numbers greatly concern me. What has happened to the passion we had when we graduated from our DH programs? Why pay that \$320 annually, you ask? Dues paid annually to ADHA are our professional insurance policy. "To me, the most valuable aspect of membership is Professional Advocacy, aka Government Relations. This very costly activity protects, and potentially expands our scope of practice through development of legislation. Our AzDHA dues support effective, high quality legislative representation through a state lobbyist. Dues also augment/supplement our annual session (Impact Conference), and send delegates to represent us at the Annual ADHA Conference." (Mary Busch, AzDHA President). If you are not in a position to or do not have the time to volunteer for ADHA that's OK. Your dues help the organization on your behalf. If money is an issue, there are payment options. You can make a difference with little effort, and yes, some monetary investment.

We all know about the need for preventative oral services that are lacking for the underserved. "ADHA recognizes the unmet needs of groups such as low-income children, pregnant women, elders, and persons who are developmentally, physically, mentally, or medically compromised. ADHA advocates for the inclusion of oral health content in existing programs to prevent disease, promote health, and solve health problems among these populations. They advocate for the development of evidence-based programs to improve health. The advocacy efforts are focused on advancing the profession of dental hygiene at the state and federal level." (ADHA website, Education and Research, Public Health). There are plenty of hygienists available in Arizona, but not enough preventative service opportunities. There are rules and regulations in place that prevent us from legally caring for these individuals. Providing dental hygiene services should not be so restrictive, and it is what we are educated to do! Dental disease is preventable, we all know this. Dentists can drill, fill, and extract teeth and all that is great; but it is a temporary fix. The poor oral health continues: i.e. periodontal disease, new decay, etc.

I am personally concerned about when I will one day need assistance with oral care: How I will receive care? Can I receive professional care with knowledgeable care specialists? Will I become a statistic of poor elder oral health? I hope this message lit a spark. You can influence the direction in which your profession goes. I hope you will make a "Professional Sacrifice" for your future. Lynn Radler, RDH, APDH