

The profession of dental hygiene continues to gain recognition in a myriad of forums, including international symposia. At the recent FDI meeting held in Sydney, the IFDH presented a session entitled 'Dental Hygiene – A Global Profession'. This session was recognised by Her Excellency, the Governor of New South Wales, during her remarks made at the FDI Opening Ceremony in front of 5000 dental professionals. The IFDH session included information on the International Profile of Dental Hygiene 1987–2000, presented by Dr Pat Johnson. Her paper is published in the *International Dental Journal* 2003, Vol. 53, 299–312, and details the changing patterns in dental hygiene practice, workforce and educational standards. For example, the ratio of dental hygienists per population and per dentist has increased, indicating a growth in the number of dental hygienists authorised to practise. Dental hygiene education continues to evolve to the baccalaureate level, and more programmes have started around the world. The autonomy for the profession has also grown, and the requirements for work supervision has declined. This longitudinal study by Dr Johnson is an important source for the profession and will be presented during the 16th International Symposium on Dental Hygiene to be held in Madrid from July 8 to 11, 2004.

It is not only in the countries that already have dental hygienists that the numbers are increasing. Recently, France has started to investigate the opportunity to delegate preventive dental care to a new member of the oral health team. The IFDH has had the possibility to participate in the French discussion meetings and publish articles on dental hygiene in the journal of the SFPIO. Dental Hygienists from Jordan, Kuwait, Dubai, Slovakia, Slovenia and Murmansk have also contacted the IFDH.

We trust that these countries continue to develop the profession and become a part of the global community of preventive oral care.

A further example of the continued recognition of dental hygienists was provided during the combined meeting of the Swiss Society of Periodontology and the Swiss Dental Hygienists held in St Gallen during November 2003. My presentation addressed the subject, 'The Dental Hygienist – the key person in the future dental team'. The key focus of the presentation is the recognition that the time has come to put the profession forward in collaboration with dentists as well as other healthcare providers. There is no rationale for dentists' supervision or direction of dental hygienists or for examining patients before they go to a dental hygienist. With a more collaborative model, which has evolved over the years, as shown in Dr Johnson's longitudinal study, the dental hygienists should work as primary healthcare providers. The evidence-based knowledge of today is that the majority of oral diseases may be prevented through a healthy lifestyle: good oral hygiene including fluoride toothpaste, good dietary habits and no smoking will prevent most of the periodontal diseases, dental caries and oral cancer.

We have the competence to provide oral health promotion, disease prevention and treatment of early signs of disease. The dental hygienist is the only healthcare professional and member of the oral health team whose primary function continues to be the prevention of oral disease and promotion of wellness. In conclusion: be proud of your evolving profession!

Kerstin Öhrn
President IFDH

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