

Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to the first issue of the *International Journal of Dental Hygiene* for 2008.

I have been very fortunate to have been able to visit and talk with dental hygienists in several countries in Europe this last half year and also to speak with dental hygienists from the US and Australia. It was a very informative and wonderful experience.

One of the countries I visited was Russia, where the profession was legalized in 2001 and there are now over 1600 dental hygienists operating. The profession is supported by one dental hygiene association. Dental hygiene programs are generally two years in length and there are currently eight dental hygiene schools throughout the country, one of which is a private school.

In contrast, the dental hygiene profession in Italy has been legalized since 1988 and has three dental hygiene associations, over 2000 working dental hygienists and in excess of 30 dental hygiene schools. Dental hygiene education consists of a 3-year baccalaureate degree program based in universities. The Russian Dental Hygienist Association is striving for the same type of educational credential.

The trend in Europe is toward a 3-year baccalaureate degree. An exception to this is the Netherlands where the baccalaureate degree for dental hygienists is four years in length. In addition, one dental hygiene school in Portugal still has a 4-year degree program, although they are planning to reduce the curriculum into a 3-year program.

One of the goals of the European professional associations is to move toward a comparable standard of education in Europe. This would facilitate educational exchange, free movement of labour and equal access to higher education combined with the human right of all European citizens to have access to a comparable standard of dental hygiene care. The IFDH would like to achieve this globally.

While we are striving for commonality of education credentials, we can also strive towards similar ability outcomes of our

educational programs. It is time to go beyond counting the hours a student has received in a certain topic area and focus on the shared abilities that we possess.

It is also logical that countries will want to assess the quality of dental hygienists from other countries; protection of the public requires that, until such time as we can establish reciprocity agreements, but those only come with time and effort. Until such time, as we may have an international accreditation process, we can still support labour mobility by assessing candidates from an abilities perspective and then supporting candidates who require additional upgrading with structured educational opportunities.

We need to breakdown the barriers to the registration and licensing processes and support our international colleagues with access to relevant learning experiences so that they can meet the standards of our respective countries if they do not already possess them. Our current structures are often unhelpful. They are often a waste of time and energy for our colleagues and for the country involved as most countries have a shortage of dental hygienists.

Let us keep in mind the definition of a dental hygienist as articulated by the International Federation of Dental Hygienists when judging our colleagues from other countries:

'A dental hygienist is a health professional and is graduated from a recognized school of Dental Hygiene, who, through clinical services, education, consultative planning and evaluation endeavours, seeks to prevent oral disease, provides treatment for existing disease, and assists people in maintaining an optimum level of oral health. Dental hygienists are health professionals whose primary concern is the promotion of total health through the prevention of disease'.

Let us be respectful and mindful of our shared abilities.

Marjolijn Hovius
President IFDH

E-mail: marjolijn.hovius@inholland.acta.nl

Copyright of International Journal of Dental Hygiene is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.