

As a young and freshly graduated dentist, my academic career started with a part-time position at the School of Dental Hygiene in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Working under the same roof as the Dental School allowed me to collaborate with the Department of Periodontology at Utrecht University. I was assigned to upgrade the level of periodontal knowledge for what was then a 2-year curriculum. The education of a dental hygienist at that time primarily focused on caries prevention and the prevention and treatment of periodontal problems.

Over the years, I have come to truly appreciate the role of the dental hygienist in the various dental fields. At present, the ratio of periodontists to dental hygienists in my own practice is approximately 1:3, with 11 hygienists working on the team. Hygienists display a high professional level of involvement in the treatment process and play a pivotal role in the success of a practice restricted to Periodontology.

Much has changed since the early days of my career. The Dental Hygiene curriculum increased from 2 to 3 and then to 4 years. The paper in this volume from Jongbloed *et al.* describes in more detail the development of the dental hygienist's education and profession in the Netherlands over the last 45 years. The professional profile has also changed. Dental hygienists initially worked under the supervision of dentists. Changes in Dutch law have created a broader working relationship that allows dental hygienists to start their own practices. Currently, dental hygienists are able to provide local anaesthesia and to restore small cavities. Patients do not even need a referral to visit their clinics. This change was stimulated by the Dutch government because it was expected that these developments, together with competitive honorarium levels, would lower the costs of dental care. The paper by Jerkovic *et al.* in this issue evaluates the impact of this changed professional profile with respect to job satisfaction and job content.

The bachelor's degree that is obtained at the end of the 4-year Dental Hygiene training offers students the opportunity to continue with a master's project. The paper by Van Maanen *et al.* is an example of a completed project for a master's thesis. This increased scientific awareness has had a positive impact on the evidence-based level of Dental Hygiene education and professionalization. The paper by Blom *et al.* and Keukenmeester *et al.* are examples of the bachelor's thesis requirement for the dental hygienist degree.

The best illustration of the increase in scientific awareness may be the composition of the clinical research team at the

Academic Center for Dentistry in Amsterdam. I began 25 years ago with two dentists, and I now guide a team consisting of nine dental hygienists. The authors of the papers published by the group have dental hygienists as co-authors, with some even listed as first author. This issue also includes the work of three dental hygienists who have already defended their PhD theses and three who are on the verge of finalizing their dissertations.

This issue of the International Journal of Dental Hygiene includes various research designs, such as original research projects and systematic reviews. The latter are important for evidence-based decision-making and provide scientific support for the many types of professional advice and treatment provided by dental hygienists worldwide. Over the years, the International Journal of Dental Hygiene has proven to be a platform for research findings related to everyday Dental Hygiene practices. At the start under the enthusiastic supervision of the first Editor-in-Chief, the Dutch dental hygienist Marjolijn Hovius.

I was honoured to be invited to be the guest editor of this 'Dutch issue' of the International Journal of Dental Hygiene as a tribute to 45 years of the Dental Hygiene Association in the Netherlands. Together with the current Editor-in-Chief Kerstin Öhrn, I have assigned reviewers to the submitted papers. As a guest editor, I thank the authors and reviewers for their time, effort and input. The help of Dagmar Else Slot has been invaluable to finish this project on time.

All first authors who contributed to this issue are Dental Hygienists by training. The level of research demonstrates their different directions in the field of oral health. I am proud of what Dutch Dental Hygiene has become, and I believe that the important role of Dental Hygienists in the professional oral care team is beautifully illustrated through this compilation. For those countries that lack Dental Hygienists, this *Little History of Dutch Dental Hygiene* may serve as a stimulus to open the doors to this indispensable addition to the professional dental team.

Prof. Dr G. A. (Fridus) Van der Weijden  
*NVvP Chair: "Prevention and Therapy of Periodontal Infections"*  
 Department of Periodontology  
 Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam (ACTA)  
 University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam  
 Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
 E-mail: g.vd.weijden@acta.nl

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