

2005 AAPHD Special Merit Award: Dolores Malvitz, BA, MPH, DrPH

Presented by Candace M. Jones, RDH, MPH

The AAPHD Special Merit Award is presented for special meritorious service to public health dentistry. I am pleased to announce Dr. Dolores Malvitz as the recipient of the 2005 Special Merit Award.

Dr. Malvitz' love of learning earned her many degrees including a BA, MPH and Doctorate in Public Health – all from schools in Michigan. She also served as Chair of the Department of Dental Hygiene at the College of Dentistry at the University of Oklahoma. In 1987, she joined the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the rest is history. During her 17 years at the Division of Oral Health (DOH), Dolores provided leadership in developing the National Oral Health Surveillance System and

building and mentoring a cadre of professionals dedicated to provide the scientific basis for effective and efficient public health interventions to improve the oral health of the nation. Dolores has been the instigator, initiator and promoter of many activities at DOH that have had direct impact on the health of the nation, including the CDC recommendations for fluoride use and the recommendations for infection control in the dental office. She has been author and co-author of many articles in the biomedical literature in topics ranging from practice of dental hygiene to economic analysis of public health interventions, including many important papers in public health policy. Dolores has been directly responsible

for establishing key cooperative agreements with the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, a partnership that has yielded important gains in the capacity of local programs to address the oral health problems of their constituents.

In addition to her work at CDC, Dolores has functioned in various positions in professional organizations in dental hygiene and dental public health. She served on the AAPHD Executive Council from 1990 to 1993. She also served on the *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* Editorial Board from 1989-92. Dolores also served three terms on the *Journal of Dental Education* Editorial Board from 1978-81; 1986-89 and 1989-92.

Dolores served on the American Dental Hygienists' Association's (ADHA) Council on Public Health from 1997-99 and was chairperson from 1998-99; and she also served as advisor to the Council from 1999-2001. Dolores was a member of the *Journal of Dental Hygiene* Editorial Board from 1975-78 and 1994-97.

When I asked Dolores to tell me about some accomplishments that she is most proud of in her 30-year career, she indicated that in all roles she tried to use sound science (social and behavioral, as well as biologic) and critical thinking as the foundation on which to make decisions which would most benefit the public, patients, and students. She tried to emphasize the special ethical obligations of health professionals and to demonstrate how all disciplines (including the arts and humanities!) contribute to and enrich the totality of our lives.

Early in her decade at the University of Oklahoma, the performance of graduates on the Dental Hygiene National Board moved from the mean to two standard deviations above the mean. In all those years, they had



Left to right: Dolores Malvitz, Candace Jones

only one student who failed on the first try. A majority of graduates stayed in the state to practice, and the program still exists—a major achievement now that baccalaureate degree programs within dental schools have become an endangered species.

She is also proud that multiple former students and protégés have gone on to graduate education, earned doctoral degrees, and made extraordinary contributions to the public's health; many hold leadership posi-

tions in dental hygiene, public health, or within broader societal institutions.

And finally she shared that against all odds, oral health became a component of several major surveillance systems at CDC, and has been retained in others, in spite of in spite of opposition. Without data to use for decision-making, there can be no public health process. The Surveillance Investigation and Research Team also made important contributions to the science base, e.g., two JPHD “best pa-

pers,” economic and other applied research and synthesis of science into recommendations. And they mentored more new “public healthers” than was expected, given the small number of federal employees they had at CDC.

Dolores, it is a real pleasure to present the 2005 Special Merit Award to you for a wonderful career in dental public health. Thank you for the important and lasting contributions you have made.

Remarks on Receiving the Special Merit Award

Dolores M. Malvitz, BA, MPH, DrPH

As I enjoy and appreciate this really lovely moment, it seems important to note how widely my career deviated from the life I had envisioned, now some 45 years ago, when I ventured a few miles up the road to enter a certificate program in dental hygiene at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. That two-year education would allow me to move back to Carleton, marry my handsome high school boyfriend, have babies, live happily ever after as a pillar of the community, *and* buy a professional insurance policy, in case my handsome husband died. (That was how women were taught to think—or not—back then!)

That I am standing here, accepting this award for quite different contributions, stems from the efforts of many who touched, shaped—or bombarded—my life. In the interests of the meeting schedule, I'll neither list them all, nor wax endlessly eloquent about the quality of their contributions to my career.

I do recognize, however, that persons, places, and circumstances combine to affect our lives, sometimes in monumental ways. And so, my ab-

breviated list of those most responsible for my being here today:

- My parents, who put education first—and *somehow* found resources to fund that first college experience, which changed my life.
- Five dentists who altered my own view of what I could do. All valued my contributions—and said, out loud, to all who would listen, that I had skills and knowledge they did not. Each went out on a limb in order to hire me, nudged me to accept more responsibility, apologized for my directness (and who knows what all else. . .), went well beyond the norm to provide crucial support, or “all of the above.” In chronological order, **THANK YOU:** William Spencer; David Striffler; Bill Brown; Larry Furman; and Don Marianos. (It's probably not a coincidence that two of the five received this very award, themselves) David Striffler, especially, deserves praise for his egalitarian mentoring of dental hygienists, in an era when

it was very, very, very rare among his peers.

- Taxpayers of the State of Michigan, who funded a world-class institution of higher education—as well as the scholarship I earned with my high school grades. . . and taxpayers of the U.S., who paid me a stipend (of \$300/month) to attend graduate school, during those halcyon days of public health traineeships.
- My many excellent, talented colleagues—together, over the years, we accomplished the progress for which I am being honored. It's a cliché, but the truth: The sum always IS far greater than the individual parts. As a retiree, working with these collegial peers remains one of the things I most miss.
- My nominator, Bill Maas, and the Awards Committee, who decided I met the criteria for the Special Merit Award.

THANK YOU all; I am *so* grateful to AAPHD for this recognition.