Meeting commentary

Reflections on the ADHA meeting

By Patricia Walsh, RDH
Editor in Chief

First met Esther Wilkins quite by accident. It was early in the morning on the 7:15 a.m. Chicago convention train headed for the annual meeting. Marginal wake after a 12-hour convention festivity the previous day, I walked onto a hotel elevator. No badge, no makeup, and in search of strong coffee. I glanced at the person I shared the lift with and did a double take. I tilted my head to one side and said, “Aren’t you …?” There she was, our Florence Nightingale. I was all alone with Dr. Wilkins for a whole glorious eight floors. The love we have for this hygienist is palpable. You see it at every book signing. We wish to hold her hand, feel her genuine warmth. Just being near her makes us feel like we are somehow connected to the original intention and purity of our profession. One of the highlights of the American Dental Hygienists Association annual meeting was a morning speaker who opened with an unofficial “benediction” taken from “The Book of Esther.” About a thousand dental professionals got the joke immediately and burst into wild applause. When Dr. Wilkins spoke to us this year, not onstage, but via the Jumbotron screen, you could have heard a pin drop. She is the “true north” on our professional compass.

Technology sometimes leaves me scrambling to keep up. I would be lost without regular continuing education courses even if they weren’t a licenser requirement. This was not the case for the first 20 years of my career. But in more recent years, there has been an explosion of change in our profession. My office was one of the first in the state to go digital. Since then, the improvements that have been made with panorex clar- city and definition are amazing. Its capabilities astound me. A camera with one lens, a single exposure, and one computer program finds anything in the mouth that eludes the human eye.

Although most dental hygienists are employed in the private practice setting, many of us have chosen to take our mission “to the streets” in a variety of ways during the past 100 years. We can still be seen as public health workers, teachers, marketers, and sales representatives, re-search professionals, and more.

I personally have had a very rewarding career that has spanned almost 30 years in the dental health industry. Although most of those years were spent in clinical practice, twice during this time I left to pursue new products and services giving other dental professionals the tools they need to do their work more efficiently and, in turn, help them reach more people. No matter where we practice, the cause of improving oral health unites us all.

Dental hygienists have always strived to educate the public on the value of oral health and its role on one’s overall well-being. Today that message is even more powerful as many believe the mouth is an indicator of a person’s whole-body health. So, my fellow colleagues, I say we pause for just an instant to consider the message of our original dental hygienist mission on a much larger scale and make room chairside for new graduates. Sharing information on new products and services gives other dental professionals the tools they need to do their work more efficiently and, in turn, help them reach more people. No matter where we practice, the cause of improving oral health unites us all.

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No matter what challenges lie ahead, I know that we are more than capable to rise to the occasion as we always have. So, my fellow colleagues, I say we pause to celebrate our profession and all that we have done. Have a party. Enjoy a piece of cake. But don’t rest for too long, because if we want to honor the mission that Dr. Fones set out for us 100 years ago, we still have a lot of work to do.

Are you ready? Now, let’s get started on another 100 Years of Dental Hygiene!”

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Industry commentary

Celebrating 100 years of dental hygiene

By Lori Bernardo, RDH

In 1906, when Dr. Alfred Fones came up with the idea to train his assistant, Irene New-born, to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of dental hygiene, it marked the start of a noble profession whose purpose is to eradicate oral disease and improve overall health of the whole population.

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head. If so-and-so is this excited about the combo that has left me scratching my head. I never much for vitamins other than Cal - cium and D when I turned 50. Now and then I've read something on a dental blog about traditional treatment. If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me. His words were resounding in my head: “Patty, you're a smart girl, stop reading the blogs. Read PubMed.”

He is a well-respected periodontist I know had gel at the ADHA convention booths. A hygiene blog was buzzing about it as well. The company did not have a booth at the convention, and I was disinterested. Californians have always been using it to fight inflammation in patients who did not seem to respond to traditional treatment. If it’s good enough for him, it’s good enough for me. The hygiene blogs were all buzzing about it as well. The company did not have a booth at the convention, and I was disappointed. I was ready to put their reps' feet to the fire and ask about clinical trials. As they said in Dragnet: “Just the facts ma'am, just the facts.” Perhaps the product will turn up in another year, at another big meeting.

My first hygiene textbook, “The Clinical Practice of the Dental Hygienist” (AKA, The Book of Esther) may be “old testament,” but it is the foundation of our role as holistic health care providers. Technology has furthered our role as clinicians. It has increased our responsibilities as clinicians. Technology has furthered our role as holistic health care providers.

When I wrote to a top nutritionist — a professor emeritus at a prestigious dental school — his response was chilling. “Testament,” but it is the foundation of the hygiene blogs. Read PubMed.”

His mantra seemed to be if they are selling their book after the lecture, take what they say with a grain of salt. His words were resounding in my head: “Patty, you're a smart girl, stop reading the blogs. Read PubMed.”

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shorts, but my perpetually cold feet do appreciate the introduction of soft fur.)

Our professional meetings allow us to collaborate and compare. I no longer discount the blogs. Sometimes a grass-roots effort or product takes a little longer to catch on. A rumor might just have you hold off on buying a loupe if you know it may go cordless soon. Clinical trials and documentation can take years. Dental corporations compete with one another; dental publications compete with one another. The information highway can sometimes be a one-way, one-lane street. We use our education to take what we need for the time being, and leave the rest.

I try to tell my patients not to believe everything they read or see on TV. Not only are hygienists bombarded with professional information on a daily basis, it’s that much worse for the patient. The patient never reads peer-reviewed dental journals. I heard one well-educated lecturer disparagingly use the phrase “bogus journals” at a dental meeting. I think there’s a place at the table for everyone. Only a small percentage of us are in research — and writing our doctoral thesis.

The vast majority of hygienists just want to know what works and what doesn’t. Not necessarily what is fast and easy — but what actually works. We learn so much from each other’s clinical experiences in “the trenches.” There is an understanding in the military that if you really want to know what’s going on, ask a master sergeant. Don’t ask an officer. They’re too busy with the bureaucracy.

Your doctor isn’t going to be up to date on which sensitivity toothpaste is the least abrasive. (Hint: It’s not the one you think.) He’s too busy trying to get his state income tax software to work properly. We, the hygienists, are the prevention specialists of the office.

The Oscar-winning actor Geena Davis spoke to us at the end of our ADHA session about a woman’s worth — the value of our integrity, the beauty of our intellect. Davis reminded us that we still have a long way to go to change how women as a whole are perceived. To change the Hollywood misrepresentation of women, she started the foundation called Seejane.org. I walked away from the convention hall feeling empowered and as tall as Davis in heels. She is an actor, not an actress; just as I am a hygienist, not a hygienistess.

As a profession, we were slow off the mark when it comes to diversity. I wonder sometimes if our female-oriented profession is both our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. We have evolved and diversified. I hope our individual information-gathering processes continue to evolve and diversify. Some of us are astute to changes in technology and research, while others have ears to the ground via local meetings and the Internet. We go forward together in this new information age — free from information prejudice — with an open mind and a common goal.

Corrections

Hygiene Tribune strives to maintain the utmost accuracy. If you find a factual error or content that requires clarification, please report details to Managing Editor Robert Fellick at r.fellick@dental-tribune.com.