



News & Information about Oral Health

Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner Fact Sheet

- The Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner is an answer to the oral health crisis in America by safely providing cost-effective, diagnostic, preventive, therapeutic and restorative services directly to the un-served public.
- ADHA is establishing this new position to make a positive impact on the lack of access to oral health care plaguing millions of people in the U.S., as well as part of ADHA's commitment to the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health and the *National Call to Action* to Promote Oral Health.
- The ADHA House of Delegates, representing more than 120,000 dental hygienists across the country, recognized the need for ADHA to lead the effort to address the public's unmet oral health needs and thereby approved the development of an advanced dental hygiene practitioner.
- ADHA recognizes that much of the restorative aspect of the ADHP's responsibilities will require some widespread changes with regard to scope of practice enhancements.
- The dental hygiene profession is already on the frontline of defense against disease; however, due to current state practice acts, there are unwarranted barriers imposed that do not allow the public direct access to preventive care and education from dental hygienists.
- The U.S. is experiencing a crisis shortage of dentists available to treat millions of Americans, including a concentration of un-served populations in both rural and inner city areas who are unable to obtain care because there are not enough dentists practicing in those areas.
- Government statistics reveal a projected decline in the number of dentists while there is a projected growth in the dental hygiene profession. It is clear that dental hygienists will be able to make a huge impact through the expanded role of the ADHP.
- While the ADHP could be applicable in any setting, the ADHP is expected to work in hospitals, nursing homes, public health or wherever there is a need for this position.
- The concept of an ADHP, pioneered by ADHA, is not the first of its kind in the health care industry. Precedent has been set in the nursing profession with positions that include: certified nurse midwife, nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist and certified registered nurse anesthetist. The nursing profession moved toward the development of advanced practice nurse through recognition of unmet public health needs.

- Our nation's more progressive states, which have already expanded the role of dental hygienists, have recognized that the traditional oral health delivery system does not work for many segments of our population. In a certain number of states, dental hygienists can already do some restorative procedures.
- The ADHP will be able to work with a host of public health and medical professionals in a variety of settings. This collaborative working partnership will offer patients and clients a well-rounded approach to health service.
- We expect that a number of like-minded organizations interested in increasing the public's access to oral health care will be interested in working with ADHA.
- In October, ADHA announced its support of actions taken by the American Dental Association (ADA) that demonstrated its openness to the ADHP as an ADHA-initiated solution to the severe oral health care access crisis in the U.S. These actions included the ADA's House of Delegates' referral of three ADHP-related resolutions proposed by its Board of Trustees at the ADA's annual meeting.
- ADHA believes that oral health care—a fundamental component of total health care—is the right of all people. Yet 40 percent of Americans are not getting the care they need. A number of factors inhibit access to care, the most evident being the inability to pay for care.
- Lack of access to oral health care is a critical issue in the U.S. due to disparities in the health care delivery system. This is documented in ADHA's 2001 access to care position paper, which follows the Surgeon General's 2000 report, Oral Health in America, which called untreated poor oral health a "silent X-factor promoting the onset of life-threatening diseases which are responsible for the deaths of millions of Americans each year."
- An abundance of research has identified periodontal disease as a risk factor for heart and lung disease; diabetes; premature, low-birth weight babies and a number of other systemic diseases. Also, routine oral health exams can uncover symptoms of diabetes, osteoporosis and low bone mass, eating disorders and HIV.
- ADHA recommends several solutions to the access to care issue. One is to develop partnerships among health care organizations, state and federal government and other interested groups to educate the public on the importance of oral health and the integral role it plays in total health. Another solution is for states to recognize licensed dental hygienists as Medicaid providers. And yet one more solution would be to relax state practice acts to allow more dental hygienists to provide oral health care to those who are not currently receiving it.

About ADHA

ADHA is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of the more than 120,000 dental hygienists across the country. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. For more information about ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit <http://www.adha.org>.