

Transforming Dental Hygiene Education

Proud Past, Unlimited Future



For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Robert Callahan, ADHA
312-440-8943
robertc@adha.net

Dental Hygiene Symposium Engages Key Stakeholders to Redefine Health Education

CHICAGO—On September 18, over 100 oral health stakeholders convened in downtown Chicago for an unprecedented collaboration to envision the role of the dental hygiene profession in the future health care system. A joint endeavor of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), the ADHA Institute for Oral Health and The Santa Fe Group, "Transforming Dental Hygiene Education" has paved the way for a fundamental shift in how dental hygienists will be prepared for an ever-changing health care system.

Dental hygiene educators and practitioners, program directors, and association officers joined with representatives of federal agencies, philanthropy groups, oral health institutions and other health professions to take a hard look at the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary dental hygiene education, and determine what must change in order for dental hygienists to better meet the oral health needs of the American public.

Attendees weighed the potential impact of their decisions in the context of the Affordable Care Act. They spoke at length about the barriers to change that must be overcome, and heard from their peers on innovative collaboration models. Former Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Dr. Claude Earl Fox explained how attendees could lead the transformation of their own profession, and representatives of nursing, pharmacy and physician assistants explained how their professions have extended their scope of practice through innovation and persistent efforts to influence the legislative, educational and practice environments.

ADHA President Denise Bowers, RDH, PhD, and Santa Fe Group President Linda Niessen, DMD, MPH, MPP, presided over the event. Niessen, whose group boasts an impressive roster of academics, practitioners and business leaders, called the symposium "a catalyst for the change needed to ensure dental hygiene's relevance."

President Bowers was similarly pleased. "It is not every day that representatives from the highest levels of all of those groups gather in one place, and it is remarkable that they did so specifically to discuss the future of dental hygiene education," she remarked in an address to the association's membership. "I believe that the process ADHA has initiated will continue because the people in the room who were talking to each other will seize on the momentum to bring about much needed change."

That process has already begun, with the development of an academic white paper and detailed proceedings of the event. In the immediate wake of the symposium, ADHA's board of trustees made the bold decision to alter the ADHA strategic plan to reflect the outcomes of the symposium; the association's core ideology now focuses on "lead[ing] the transformation of the dental hygiene profession to improve the public's oral and overall health." Representatives of ADHA and the Santa Fe Group will present the symposium outcomes at the American Dental Education Association's annual meeting in March of 2014.

In a similar spirit of proactive movement, the Academy for Academic Leadership and ADHA will partner with Dr. Pamela Overman of the University of Missouri Kansas City School of Dentistry to lead several dental hygiene education programs to develop domains, competencies and strategies for improvements in the dental hygiene curriculum discussed in "Transforming Dental Hygiene Education." A report on this project will be presented at ADHA's Center for Lifelong Learning in June.

One of the factors that made "Transforming Dental Hygiene Education" extraordinary was the willingness of corporate and philanthropic partners to lend their support to the cause. ADHA thanks Sunstar, Colgate, Dentsply, Procter & Gamble, Premier Dental, Patterson Dental and Henry Schein Dental, as well as the DentaQuest Foundation, the Washington Dental Service Foundation, the American Dental Education Association Gies Foundation and the Institute for Oral Health in Washington for their contributions.

Columbia University's Dr. Michael Sparer reminded the assembled that, whether or not the Affordable Care Act is funded and implemented, the trends that gave rise to it and the action taken have left an indelible mark on the American health care system. And while the long-term impact of ADHA's symposium cannot be foreseen, it has certainly begun a conversation that will have lasting implications for the nation's oral health.

About the American Dental Hygienists' Association

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of more than 150,000 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 ADHA at www.adha.org.

About The Santa Fe Group

The Santa Fe Group is a group of internationally renowned scholars and leaders from business and the professions bound by a common interest to improve oral health. Together, the group strives to be a catalyst of positive change by leading the assembly of decision-makers and stakeholders to generate innovative solutions for fundamental health system problems. The Santa Fe Group fosters policy and initiates actions to improve the health and well-being of the public. The group accomplishes this mission by analyzing and disseminating health program and policy information, by creating networks of concerned citizens from all walks of life, and developing advocacy programs to promote change for improved health.

About the ADHA Institute for Oral Health

The ADHA Institute for Oral Health is the only foundation dedicated to the professional, educational and research needs of current and future dental hygiene professionals. The ADHA Institute for Oral Health—created by dental hygienists, for dental hygienists—provides scholarships, fellowships, research grants and community service grants throughout the country. To donate or to learn more about our grant opportunities, visit the ADHA Institute for Oral Health at www.adha.org/ioh.