American Dental Hygienists’ Association Mourns the Loss of Dental Hygiene Educator and Mentor Michele Darby, RDH, MS

Chicago (Feb. 6, 2015) — The American Dental Hygienists’ Association (ADHA), its leadership, members, staff and those allied to the profession are deeply saddened by the passing of dental hygiene educator, mentor, and champion Michele Darby, RDH, MS. The impact Michele had on the dental hygiene profession and its practitioners was immense, as was her commitment to the improvement of patient care and public health throughout the world. The ADHA sends its sincerest condolences to her family and friends.

“Michele Darby impacted the lives of countless dental hygienists and others in oral health, giving selflessly to help others improve their skills and knowledge, and concurrently make the lives of their patients better,” said ADHA President Kelli Swanson Jaecks, MA, RDH. “She leaves a legacy that is both extraordinary and wonderful, one that will always be remembered by those whose lives she touched.”

Michele’s dental hygiene career started when she graduated in 1969 from the University of Pittsburgh with certificates in dental assisting and dental hygiene, followed by a BS in dental hygiene from Columbia University in 1971 and a Masters of Dental Hygiene from Columbia in 1972. She then began her lifelong commitment to teaching and empowering dental hygiene students as an instructor at Columbia University for two years before moving to Old Dominion University (ODU), where she progressed from Assistant Professor in 1974 to her eventual role as Professor, Eminent Scholar, Graduate Program Director, and Chair of the Gene W. Hirschfeld School of Dental Hygiene at ODU.

“Just a few months ago I was fortunate to have a meaningful conversation with Michele at Old Dominion University,” said ADHA Executive Director Ann Battrell, MSDH, “and her drive and passion for dental hygiene, her students, and her colleagues and friends was as strong as ever. Our profession changed significantly with the introduction of the Darby and Walsh textbook Dental Hygiene: Theory and Practice in which Michele Darby and Margaret (Peg) Walsh established the Human Needs Model. They set out...
not to tell dental hygienists what to think, but how to think critically. Michele was one in a million. We shall strive to uphold her vision for our profession in her memory.”

Michele’s passion for education, research, and improving oral health and the dental hygiene profession was evident in everything she did. She served as editor of ADHA’s Dental Hygiene and Educational Directions for a year and was a member of the ADHA’s Journal of Dental Hygiene (JDH) Editorial Review Board for more than 35 years, reviewing countless manuscripts and consistently working to strengthen the profession based on evidence-based research and scientific findings. Michele also served as an editorial reviewer and associate editor for other publications, and contributed to the scientific literature by publishing more than 50 peer-reviewed articles, as well as three books. She also lectured in a number of countries around the world.

Michele was an outstanding leader in dental hygiene education—she received numerous awards and accolades, including being named the recipient of the ADHA Award for Excellence in Dental Hygiene, ODU Alumni Association’s Rufus Alan Tonelson Distinguished Faculty Award, and the ADHA’s Faculty Advisor Award, and the Esther Wilkins Lifetime Achievement Award. But Michele also sought opportunities to give back and provide knowledge about the profession both in the United States and around the world. In 1981, she was a member of the first delegation of dental hygienists to visit the People’s Republic of China, sharing dental hygiene techniques, knowledge and concepts with dentists in that country. In 2010 she was the very first dental hygienist to receive a Fulbright Scholarship, which she dedicated to providing education, clinical training, and curriculum improvement at Jordan University of Science and Technology in Irbid, Jordan.

“I will always think of Michele as one of those special individuals who could do it all,” said JDH Editor-in-Chief Rebecca Wilder, BSDH, MS. “She was devoted to her husband, Dennis, and their children, Devan and Blake. She also loved the profession of dental hygiene and worked every day of her professional life to mentor and model a professional attitude and love for lifelong learning. Whether it was serving on scientific advisory boards, writing articles and textbooks, mentoring graduate students with their research projects, speaking at professional meetings, or just voicing her opinion on issues, Michele always had the interest of the dental hygiene profession at heart. In recent years she expanded her reach and became very interested in dental hygiene on an international level. She realized that there are dental hygienists throughout the world who are striving to improve oral health care and she wanted to play a key role in improving dental hygiene education globally. She was excited about the direction the profession is headed. Although we are deeply saddened by her loss, we know that through her work and legacy she will live on and continue to impact countless numbers of dental hygienists for years to come.”

About the American Dental Hygienists’ Association
The American Dental Hygienists’ Association (ADHA) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of more than 185,000 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 the ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit the ADHA at www.adha.org.