ADHA STATEMENT

Response to Allegations of Unsanitary Practices at Oral Surgeon’s Office in Tulsa

The American Dental Hygienists’ Association (ADHA) wants to reassure the public that dental hygienists maintain the highest standards in infection control to optimize patient safety and health. The isolated incident in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which an oral surgeon allegedly exposed as many as 7,000 patients to HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C through unsanitary dental practices, in no way reflects the level of care expected of dental hygienists.

As part of its Standards for Clinical Dental Hygiene Practice (adha.org/practice), ADHA advocates for dental hygienists to maintain compliance with established infection control standards that follow the most current evidence-based guidelines to reduce the risks of healthcare-associated infections in patients, and illnesses and injuries in healthcare personnel.

The standards are used by dental hygienists to shape their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, practices and behaviors that support and enhance oral health with the ultimate goal of improving overall health.

“ADHA urges all dental hygienists to maintain the highest standards and employ the best practices for infection control,” said ADHA President Susan Savage, RDH, BSDH. “Adherence to recognized infection control practices ensures patient health and safety.”

As part of ADHA policy, the organization advocates the development and utilization of emerging technologies that maximize human health and safety. ADHA also supports the Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards relating to workplace training and safety, according to ADHA policy.

Kathy Eklund RDH MHP, Secretary, Board of Directors, Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention, said OSAP has assembled information from CDC, OSHA, other federal agencies and organizations to help hygienists and other oral healthcare workers with training and education to ensure the safe and infection-free delivery of care (see www.osap.org).

“As dental hygienists we can demonstrate our skills as prevention experts and educators to let our patients know about the policies, protocols and procedures in place to keep them safe,” Eklund said.

ADHA encourages patients to discuss proper infection control procedures with their dental hygienists and dentists.

About 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.