The Professional Dental Hygienist

What is Dental Hygiene?
Science and practice of preventive of oral healthcare, including the management of behaviors to prevent oral disease and to promote health.

Dental Hygiene: Theory and Practice, 4th Edition - Darby

Who is a Dental Hygienist?
Dental hygienists are licensed preventive oral health professionals who have graduated from accredited dental hygiene programs in institutions of higher education. They provide education, clinical services, and consultation to individuals and populations of all ages in many settings and capacities. ADHA defines the professional roles of the dental hygienist as:

Clinician
Corporate
Public health
Researcher
Educator
Administrator
Entrepreneur

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Professional Associations:

- ADHA - American Dental Hygienists’ Association (national organization) www.adha.org
- SADHA - Student American Dental Hygiene Association
- TDHA - Tennessee Dental Hygienists’ Association (constituent); www.tenndha.com
- Chattanooga Area Dental Hygiene Association - (component) www.cadhs.org

Dental Hygiene Services:

Preventive:
- Primary - preventing disease before it occurs & promote health (applying fluoride)
- Secondary - treat disease from further progression (removal of calculus & biofilm)
- Tertiary - restore patient to a level of function (restorative)

Educational: motivate patient toward optimum oral health (teaching toothbrushing & flossing)

Therapeutic: treatment directed toward arresting or controlling disease & maintaining health (scaling & root planning to prevent periodontal infection)

Dental Hygiene Process of Care:

Assess
Diagnose
Plan
Implement
Evaluate
Document
Assessment: Collection of Data:
- Comprehensive health history
- Extraoral/intraoral examination
- Dentition examination, calculus ID, etc.
- Periodontal evaluation (probing, recession, mobility)
- Radiographs
- Health risk assessment (tobacco/alcohol use)
- Home care evaluation

DH Diagnosis:
- Determine needs of patient
- Identify problems that can be prevented
- Identify patient risks
- Determine cause & contributing factors
- Evaluate patient’s dental IQ, oral hygiene practices, habits, motivation level & behaviors

DH Planning: Analyze Data
- Establish priorities according to condition/severity
- Set goals related to problem
- Determine interventions - dh therapy/patient education
- Expected outcomes: evaluate results
- Present care plan
- Obtain informed consent

Evaluation:
- Determine success of care plan (were goals met & realistic?)
- Determine changes or modifications of care plan; (re-treat, refer, maintenance intervals 3, 4, or 6 month, etc.)

Documentation:
- Complete & accurate recording of all collected data, interventions, recommendations, & other information relevant to patient care

Informed Consent/Refusal:
- Informed Consent
  - Patient’s agreement to treatment after being informed of risks & benefits
  - Oral or written
  - Patients must be informed of all treatment options
  - Patient shares in decision-making process
  - Patient signs informed consent form
  - We receive both oral & written consent in Chattanooga State’s DH clinic

- Informed Refusal
  - Patient must be explained risks, benefits, & reasons for treatment, alternatives explained & given opportunity to ask questions
  - Patient may decline all or part of the treatment plan
  - Patient signs informed refusal form

Implement:
- Activating the plan
- Identify activities to be performed
- (examples: periodontal scaling, chemotherapeutics, fluoride, health, & education)
Factors Influencing DH Practice

- Ethical Issues
- Legal Issues
- Personal Issues

Ethics:
- Set of moral principals or values, principals of conduct governing an individuals or groups (study of what is right and wrong in human conduct)
- Code of Ethics
  - Describes professional conduct
  - Outlines responsibilities & duties toward patients, colleagues, & society
  - Increases awareness & sensitivity to ethical situations in practice

Code of Ethics
- Ethically & morally responsible to treat all patients without discrimination
- Interest of patient comes first (see Patient’s Rights in Policy & Procedures)
- Commitment to life-long learning
- Committed to high standards of the profession

Ethical Dilemmas:
- Problems may involve 2 morally correct answers
- No easy solutions
- Gather evidence
- Determine alternatives
- Consider pros and cons
- Determine accepted professional standard

Confidentiality
- Entrusting information will not be disclosed
- Health histories and treatment is confidential & should not be discussed where others may hear (can be discussed in an educational setting)

Professional Regulation
- Dental Practice Act
  State laws regulating dentists & dental hygienists
- Scope of Practice for Dental Hygienists
  - found in each state’s practice act
  - What can a dental hygienist legally do in state of Tennessee? (will be discussed later in curriculum)
- Rules & Regulations
  - Interpretation of laws written by state Board of Dentistry (BOD)
Licensure:

- **Licensed by examination** - upon graduation from accredited school may sit for the regional board
- **Licensure by credentials or reciprocity** - accepting past experiences/years in practice to qualify for licensure in another states

Types of Supervision:

- **Direct** - dentist has diagnosed & authorized treatment & must be present while patient is being treated (SRP - scaling/root planing)
- **General** - requires dentist to authorize services provided by a dental hygienist, but they do not have to be present (exemptions by each state law)
- **Independent practice** - owning one’s own dental hygiene practice (allowed only in certain states)
- **Direct Access** - providing services that are determined appropriate without specific authorization
- **Remote supervision** - dentist is not on site, but communication is done remotely (technology)

ADHP or Advanced Dental Therapist

- ADHP’s are licensed dental hygienists educated at Master’s degree level. ADHP’s will administer minimally invasive restorative services and have limited prescriptive authority. They are educated in health promotion and disease prevention, provision of primary care, case and practice management, quality assurance, and ethics, and provide a comprehensive approach to the delivery of oral healthcare services. ADHPs will provide care in public health settings, schools, clinics, long-term care facilities, and to a diverse patient population.