



American  
Dental  
Hygienists'  
Association

## A Letter from the 2011-2012 ADHA President

Dear Colleagues,

Partnering with ADEA to develop the *Core Competencies for Graduate Dental Hygiene Education* was a very positive and rewarding experience for ADHA. Previously, no benchmark existed to assure the quality and consistency for graduate dental hygiene education programs. Working together to advance this much needed resource provides an important step in the development of strong new leaders who will help to shape the dental hygiene profession of the future.

The *Competencies* will serve as guidelines to further define the body of dental hygiene professional knowledge; inform and guide faculty members, students, and other stakeholders in a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics included in dental hygiene graduate programs; and establish a benchmark of educational quality and content.

The ADHA board clearly recognizes and appreciates the time and effort that has gone into the development of these competencies by the Joint Work Group members and ADEA and ADHA staff. I am proud to share these thoughtful and engaging *Competencies* with all interested stakeholders.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Pamela L. Quinones'.

Pamela L. Quinones, RDH, BS



## **CORE COMPETENCIES FOR GRADUATE DENTAL HYGIENE EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

### **PREAMBLE**

Graduate education in dental hygiene is imperative for developing a cadre of dental hygiene professionals who will lead the profession and assume leadership roles in healthcare and education, as well as developing scholars to participate in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. Dental hygiene graduate education is based on a body of knowledge that is specific to the roles of the dental hygienist. In addition, a master's degree program must meet the diverse needs and interests of its students, as well as prepare graduates capable of meeting the complex oral health needs of a diverse population. Therefore, the master's degree program should consist of a multifaceted education composed of theory and practical application that provides an expanded education and the opportunity to develop additional skills in emphasis areas. In addition, technology should be utilized to make graduate education accessible to students regardless of geographic location.

Ultimately, the dental hygiene graduate program should prepare graduates to assume roles in various employment environments and provide them with the tools to initiate as well as to adapt to change. It is imperative these programs promote advanced communication and interpersonal skills, critical and reflective thinking, evidence-based-decision making, problem solving, technology and information literacy, interdisciplinary and inter-professional collaboration, scholarly inquiry and application, ethical and professional behavior, and the value of life-long learning.

The intent of this document is to further define the body of professional knowledge, and to establish an educational foundation for all graduate level dental hygiene programs. Competencies describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of the graduate, establish benchmarks for outcomes assessment, and guide the development of relevant curriculum content (1). The defined core competencies for the master's degree in dental hygiene are intended to support the educational quality of existing, developing, and future graduate education programs.

There are several purposes for the creation and use of this document. One purpose is to concisely establish the competencies that are expected of graduates. Educational competencies serve to inform and guide faculty, students and other stakeholders to have a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics of program graduates. Second, is to offer direction to graduate dental hygiene programs with respect to curriculum

development and enhancement and to establish a benchmark of educational quality. Another purpose is to assist new professionals by defining what it means to be a graduate of a master's degree program in dental hygiene, and offers direction to those seeking a graduate degree in the profession.

<sup>1</sup> Developed as a collaboration between ADEA and ADHA

Core competencies also provide direction to faculty for designing learning experiences for students, while informing stakeholders to the expectations of the graduate. The core competencies for the master's degree in dental hygiene assist in defining the profession of dental hygiene. In addition, all masters level dental hygienists should understand how oral health and the profession of dental hygiene align with a global perspective on overall health, regardless of the roles they assume after graduation, e.g., education, teaching, community health, administration or others,

Since 2008, both the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) and the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) have discussed the development of competencies through their respective structures – the ADEA Graduate Dental Hygiene Program Directors Special Interest Group and the ADHA Council on Education. Both organizations have missions that support the development of graduate competencies for the profession. ADEA's mission is “to lead individuals and institutions of the dental education community to address contemporary issues influencing education, research, and the delivery of oral health care for the improvement of the health of the public.” (2) For ADHA - “To improve the public's total health, the mission of the American Dental Hygienists' Association is to advance the art and science of dental hygiene by ensuring access to quality oral health care; increasing awareness of the cost-effective benefits of prevention; promoting the highest standards of dental hygiene education, licensure, practice and research; and representing and promoting the interests of dental hygienists.” (3)

In early 2010, the ADEA and the ADHA agreed to collaborate in the development of competencies for graduate dental hygiene education programs. A working group comprised of three representatives from each association was appointed to develop draft core competencies for dental hygiene education. It was agreed that this endeavor is an excellent opportunity for ADEA and ADHA to work in partnership to support graduate dental hygiene education.

The *Core Competencies for the Master's Degree in Dental Hygiene* recognizes the complex and diverse range of dental hygiene graduate programs. The development of these *Core Competencies* reflects current trends in the profession and the educational and health care system needs of the future. The intent of this document is to serve as a guide and provide a foundation for all graduate level dental hygiene programs irrespective of areas of emphasis, e.g., administration/management, advanced clinical practice, community health, oral health sciences, teaching/education, and/or research. Individual programs could modify the core as is appropriate to achieve individual program and institutional mission and goals. For example, if the primary goal of a graduate program is to produce dental hygiene faculty, some core domains would be emphasized more than others and additional competencies would be added to reflect education.

The organization of the document includes eight core domains, which are general categories of content, and competencies within each domain delineating more specific skills, knowledge and behaviors for the particular domain. Each of the content areas need not be a specific course within the curriculum. Threaded through multiple domains are themes related to critical thinking, life-long learning, communication, collaboration, advocacy, evidence-based decision making, and ethics. Graduate education provides the opportunity to enhance a professional's analytical and communication skills with evidence to connect theory to practice. To this end, a culminating experience in the format of a scholarly project is strongly recommended.

To assist programs the following guidelines are suggested:

1. The dental hygiene graduate program should be offered within an institution of higher learning and build on a foundation of baccalaureate education.
2. The dental hygiene graduate program should consist of a coherent pattern of courses culminating in a scholarly project such as a thesis or equivalent experience.
3. The core curriculum should ensure a basic knowledge/skill framework necessary to support specialization in designated emphasis areas and provide for supervised experience to facilitate the attainment of core competencies.
4. Behaviors expected of graduates will consist of behaviors expected of all graduates of master level programs, as well as the behaviors for the chosen emphasis area.
5. Adequate advanced preparation at the master's level must include education from the dental hygiene discipline as well as from other compatible disciplines (i.e., education, business, basic sciences, humanities, public health, advanced clinical procedures, health care management, etc.). An interdisciplinary approach is encouraged as much as feasible. However, the primary focus of graduate education in dental hygiene must be in the discipline of dental hygiene.
6. Outcome behaviors will, to varying degrees, reflect the various roles of the dental hygienist: administrator/manager, educator, researcher, clinician, advocate and health promoter. Additionally, these roles will be influenced by changes in societal and professional expectations, in the health care delivery system, and the oral health care needs of the public.

## **CORE COMPETENCIES**

**Diversity, Social & Cultural Sensitivity:** refers to the ability to engage and interact with individuals and groups across and within diverse communities and cultures in an effective and respectful manner.

1. Recognize the impact of health status and ability, age, gender, ethnicity, social, economic, and cultural factors on health and disease, health beliefs and attitudes, health literacy and the determinants of health.
2. Model cultural sensitivity in all professional endeavors.
3. Identify the needs of vulnerable populations and communities to prevent and control oral diseases and reduce health disparities.
4. Develop programs and strategies responsive to the diverse cultural and ethnic values and traditions of the communities served.

**Health Care Policy, Interprofessional Collaboration & Advocacy:** refers to the understanding of policy and its development, the value of collegiality and inter-professional collaboration and advocacy related to the promotion of health, education and the profession of dental hygiene.

1. Examine legislative and regulatory processes that determine policy, health priorities and funding for healthcare and education programs.
2. Identify principles related to the organization and financing of various health care delivery systems.
3. Evaluate the impact of legislation, regulation and policy on oral and general health, education, policy issues, and trends at the national, state and local levels.
4. Participate in the public policy process to influence consumer groups, businesses, and governmental agencies to support education and oral health care initiatives.
5. Determine evidence and data needed to support the development of new workforce models including their impact on oral health and overall health from a policy perspective.
6. Examine methods of facilitating access and partnerships to enhance healthcare and education.
7. Establish and promote interprofessional collaborations with other professionals, interest groups and social service agencies to promote and restore health.

**Health Informatics & Technology:** relates to the ability to recognize and utilize technology to advance research, healthcare, teaching and education.

1. Demonstrate the ability to access, evaluate, and interpret data from various information systems.
2. Identify existing and emerging technologies and their applications.
3. Determine the appropriate technology and software systems in the design, implementation and evaluation of community or educational programs.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legal, ethical and social issues related to emerging technology and communication/social networks.
5. Utilize information technology and health informatics in health care, educational, business and/or other employment settings.
6. Use information technology to promote and advocate for programs and policies.
7. Demonstrate effective written, oral and electronic communication skills.

**Health Promotion & Disease Prevention:** refers to all aspects of health promotion, risk assessment and reduction, and education of individuals, families and communities in the promotion of optimal oral health and its relationship to general health.

1. Design programs to reduce risks and promote health that are appropriate to health status and ability, age, gender, ethnicity, social, economic, cultural factors, and available resources.
2. Use epidemiological, social and environmental data to evaluate the oral health status of individuals, families, groups, and communities.
3. Incorporate health promotion theories and translational research in developing teaching and oral health counseling strategies that preserve and promote health and healthy lifestyles.
4. Foster inter-professional collaborations to optimize health for individuals and/or communities.
5. Evaluate the impact of oral disease on overall health to determine patient or community risk and in the development of intervention and prevention strategies to optimize positive health outcomes.

**Leadership:** refers to the ability to inspire individual, community and/or organizational excellence, create and communicate a shared vision and successfully manage change to attain an organization's strategic ends and successful performance.

1. Examine the dynamic interactions of human and social systems and how they affect relationships among individuals, groups, organizations and communities.
2. Disseminate new knowledge and contribute to best practices in the profession.
3. Apply leadership skills, theories and principles in interactions with groups and organizations to enhance innovation and change.
4. Advocate for the advancement of the dental hygiene profession and oral health improvement through service activities and affiliations with professional associations.
5. Develop strategies to motivate others for collaborative problem solving, decision-making, and evaluation.
6. Demonstrate team building, negotiation and conflict management skills.
7. Demonstrate knowledge of coaching, mentoring and networking skills in interactions with individuals, groups, organizations, and/or communities.

**Professionalism:** refers to the ability to demonstrate, through knowledge and behavior, a commitment to the highest standards of competence, ethics, integrity, responsibility, and accountability in all professional endeavors.

1. Apply self-assessment skills and life-long learning to enhance professional development.
2. Demonstrate a commitment to standards of excellence in any role of the dental hygienist.
3. Employ a professional code of ethics in all endeavors.
4. Demonstrate responsibility and accountability for actions within the various roles of the dental hygienist according to defined standards, regulations and policies.
5. Recognize one's obligation to take action to enhance the health, welfare and interest of a diverse society.
6. Promote high standards of personal and organizational integrity, honesty and respect for all people and communities.

**Program Development & Administration:** relates to the assessment, planning implementation, and evaluation of programs and systems related to an area of emphasis such as teaching, education, community outreach, or other emphasis area.

1. Demonstrate a program development process to include assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation to meet the goals of a developed program.
2. Develop collaborative partnerships to accomplish program goals.
3. Select program development models to meet specific program objectives.

4. Apply outcomes assessment and quality improvement models that apply to and evaluate programs.
5. Examine financing and resource management processes within organizational systems.
6. Formulate a comprehensive strategic plan for a department, organization, association or other entity.
7. Employ basic managerial, administrative, interpersonal and human relations skills in a team-based environment.

**Scholarly Inquiry and Research**: relates to the ability to utilize scientific theory, research methodology and research findings, as well as critical and reflective thinking for clinical and/or organizational evidence-based decision making.

1. Apply the research process to an identified problem.
2. Demonstrate professional writing and presentation skills in the dissemination of research findings .
3. Conduct a comprehensive systematic literature search relevant to a specific topic and critically evaluate the evidence gathered.
4. Demonstrate skill in proposal development and writing.
5. Analyze and interpret quantitative and qualitative data from the research literature to guide problem solving and evidence-based decision making.
6. Synthesize information from evidence-based literature to apply to a community health, education, clinical practice, and/or research problem.
7. Design and implement a scholarly project in an area of emphasis.

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