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Interprofessional Collaboration between Dental Hygienists and Registered Nurses: The Time is Overdue

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The recent publication of an article that is listed as a Critical Issue in the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*¹ deserves strong letters of endorsement from nursing professionals.² It has been twelve years since the Institute of Medicine called for interprofessional education to be adopted by the health professional education community. The increasing numbers of dentists in dental programs and the decreasing numbers of physicians in medical programs lend itself for dentists and physicians to be supportive of such interprofessional collaborations. There is so much potential for registered nurses and dental hygienists to work together to improve the health of the public. This recent publication serves to refuel the question raised by Jackie Fried in 1987, "Interprofessional Collaboration: If not now, when?"³ And additionally, the Editorial remarks made by Lisa Mallonee in 2012, "The Need for Inter-Professional Collaboration."⁴ The dental hygienists and registered nurses of today need to develop inter-professional relationships – now! The growing numbers of the population and because of people living longer demands it. The educational preparation for a registered nurse, does determine the degree of ability to provide oral care to a patient, other than just handing the person a toothbrush and some toothpaste. For example, a clinical master's degree in nursing preparation and that of a doctorate degree in nursing provides the knowledge and skills for physical assessment skills for the entire body for diagnostic purposes. But the need being addressed in this article pertaining to registered nurses is examining oral complications of xerostomia, dysphagia, and trismus. Even educating the nursing staff on the care of patients with dentures would help decrease their unnecessary losses and breakages when hospitalized. It takes more than a toothbrush, a suction tip, and toothpaste to meet the needs of certain kinds of patients that mandates specialized oral care; the examples mentioned are just a few where the expertise and the skills of a dental hygienist can provide assistance. We must first begin interprofessional collaboration by breaking down barriers to effective communication, misperceptions of occupational roles, and out of touch curricula in the training of these two professional groups that still are addressing the human body as if it is separate and not one unit that works together. Programs for con-

tinuing education for registered nurses must realize that there are gaps in the educational preparation of nurses due to program variations for knowledge and skills required. Diverse educational preparation can lead to differences in skill training that can later be obtained through continuing professional education. Opportunities to close this gap to enhance care for meeting the oral needs of patients can be met by dental hygienists through continuing professional education as well as interprofessional educational initiatives between students of dental hygiene and Bachelor of Science in nursing degree students.⁵ Recent research conducted by the dental hygiene and dental professionals have consistently shown that there is need for inter professionalism among other groups and not just with nursing. However, results of such research must also be widely published in communities other than just the dental medium.

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