



THE CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES

For immediate release (Disponible en français sur demande)

Media Release

Championing Oral Health in the Health System Transformation

July 27, 2012 (Ottawa, ON) — The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) congratulates the Council of the Federation (CoF) on their leadership role in identifying innovative and transformative changes for the health care system. [The CoF July 2012 report](#) "*From Innovation to Action: First Report of the Health Care Innovation Working Group*" highlights team based models of care, including the Family Health Team Clinic at St. Michael's Hospital, Ontario. This interprofessional team is comprised of dental hygienists, physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, chiropractors, psychologists, social workers, dietitians, and pharmacists. Dental hygienists' focus on oral health promotion and disease prevention fits well with the team focus on client self-management.

Oral health is essential for overall wellness and it is an integral part of physical, social, and mental wellbeing. An oral health wellness approach integrated with the team approach contains costs and increases the return on health investments, by reducing future oral disease treatment costs. CDHA recommends that the provinces and territories integrate an oral health wellness approach in all team based models of care, such as primary care teams, and community health centres.

The CoF report identifies several priority health issues including heart health and diabetes. Research shows a link between periodontal disease and diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and lung disease. A client who has two co-existing medical conditions, periodontal disease and diabetes, will experience more difficulty controlling their blood sugar levels than someone who does not have periodontal disease. Dental hygienists educate individuals with diabetes, heart and lung conditions to prevent and manage inflammation in their mouths in order to have better overall health.

The CoF report also identifies seniors' health issues as a priority. Seniors in long term care (LTC) facilities have significant unmet oral health needs. As the population ages, we must proactively plan for better access to and improved quality of oral care for this population. Only five provinces/territories in Canada currently offer seniors' dental programs, including Alberta, Yukon, North West Territories, Nunavut, and Prince Edward Island. CDHA recommends that the provinces/territories provide access to oral health promotion and disease prevention for all low income seniors.

Many long-term care residents become dependent on others. They cannot direct their own care and many have no family to monitor care. Provincial/territorial LTC regulations that include minimum standards for oral health care and compliance measures are essential to protect these vulnerable individuals.

CDHA president Arlynn Brodie reports that, “Dental hygienists are proud to be part of the continuous improvement in health care. We are ideally placed to provide skills development programs to help LTC staff meet residents’ daily oral hygiene needs. Dental hygienists have expertise in oral health treatment planning, and adapting clinical care to the oral health needs of seniors. They can also advise on issues such as techniques for holding a toothbrush, special care for dentures, the importance of maintaining a regular schedule of brushing and flossing, and the impact of medication on decreased saliva production. These programs will improve seniors’ oral health and result in efficiencies within LTC.”

CDHA and dental hygienists across Canada look forward to assisting and supporting the CoF to improve health care for all Canadians. Serving the profession since 1963, CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 24,000 registered dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing 16,500 individual members including dental hygienists and students. Dental hygiene is the 6th largest registered health profession in Canada with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit: www.cdha.ca

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