



## Celebrating 25 Years of Independent Practice

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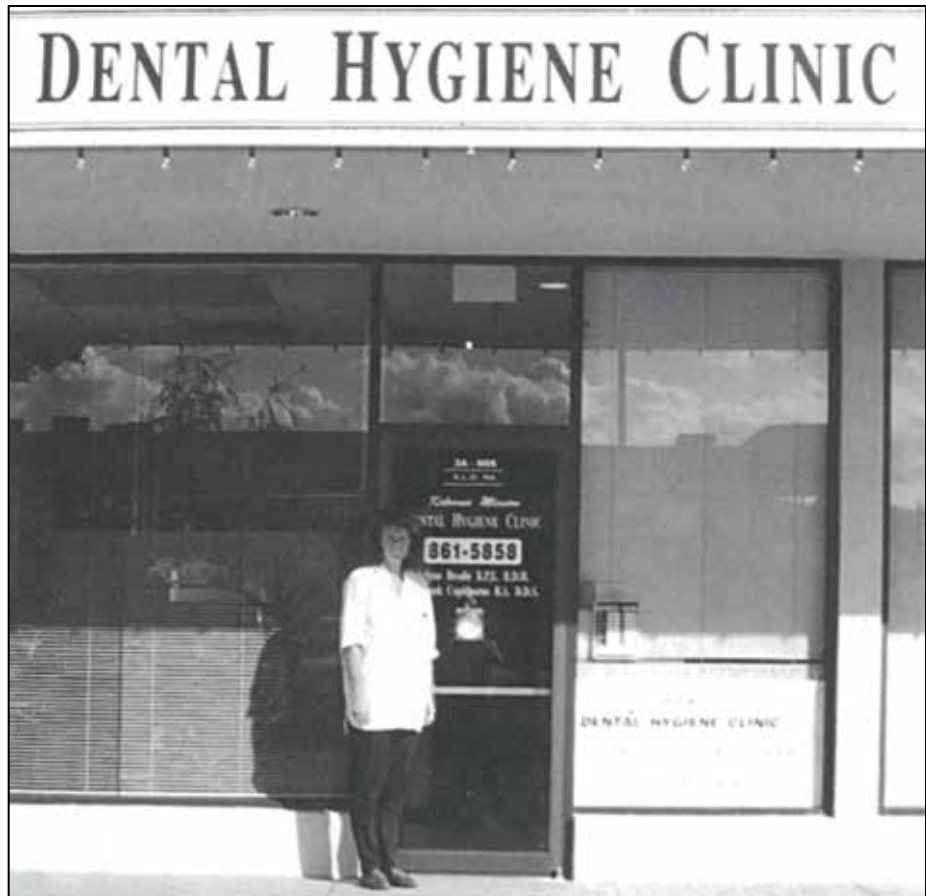
It doesn't seem possible that 25 years ago I opened the Kelowna Mission Dental Hygiene Clinic in Kelowna, British Columbia. What an adventure! In 1995 dental hygiene clinics were a new entity; in Canada they didn't exist. The opening brought about both excitement and uneasiness in the minds of dental hygienists. For the most part there was intrigue, interest, and anticipation of a new future for the dental hygiene profession in Canada.

Change is an interesting phenomenon. While it is often uncomfortable and disruptive, it is what drives growth. Many of the current processes we have in place today to support independent practice were initiated in response to changes in how dental hygiene services were being delivered. In 1995 dental hygienists did not have unique billing numbers, insurance companies did not reimburse dental hygienists, regulatory bodies did not have practice guidelines for advertising, name registration or infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines, radiographic equipment registration requirements did not exist, and in my case, only one dental supply company would supply me with products.

Despite the challenges, the clinic emerged. The first challenge was the business plan, not to develop, but to be accepted by a lending institution. Their files did not list a "dental hygiene clinic." The second issue was securing lease space because no risk history existed for a dental hygiene clinic. Remodelling a ground-level walk-up space in a strip mall that included other health care providers proved to be valuable. Operatories were designed with the needs of a dental hygienist in mind, 3 in total, optimistic of future need. In the beginning I did everything required to run the business; gradually, over time, I hired other dental hygienists,

a bookkeeper, and a receptionist. Advertising was mostly by word of mouth, admittedly a slow process, but it was, by far, the most sustainable. Being involved in many community events and initiatives contributed to public awareness of and support for the clinic.

During the 1990s, self-regulation of our profession was being pursued by many provinces; the profession of dental hygiene was moving forward! We have come a long way in 25 years, or have we? I opened the clinic to provide an alternative and to increase access to oral care. Today, we are still struggling



▲ Arlynn outside her clinic in Kelowna, BC, in 1995  
Source: *Probe*, Volume 30, Number 1 (1996), pp. 22–23.

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## FEATURE

*Celebrating 25 Years...cont'd*

to increase access to dental hygiene care, especially in rural and remote communities. In some provinces, dental hygienists are able to respond to this problem because they can practise their full scope of practice in a variety of settings, yet other provinces are still working to achieve similar abilities.

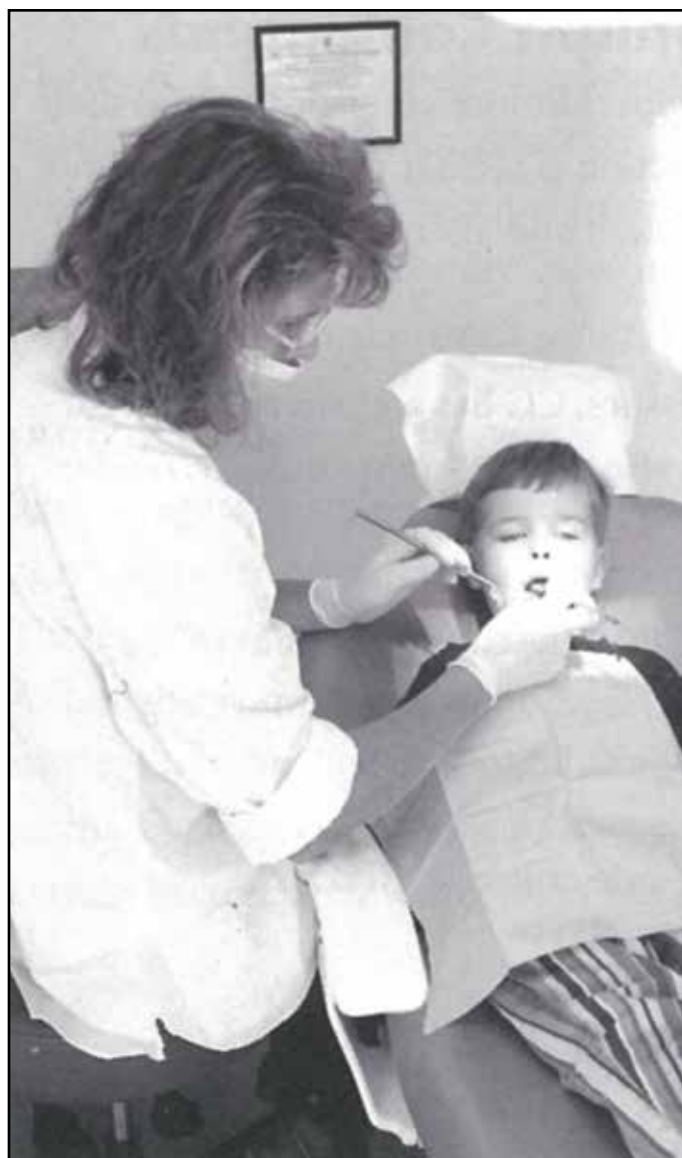


▲ Arlynn today as registrar/executive director of the College of Dental Hygienists of Manitoba

Many years ago I said, "small business ownership is not for everyone," and I believe this to be true today. For those of you who have embraced the challenge of providing dental hygiene services in non-traditional settings, I applaud you! For those of you who are contemplating a new practice challenge and adventure, I encourage you to embrace this wonderful opportunity! We must keep growing and visioning for the future. What will the next step be? Collaborative practice with other health care providers? Many have asked me over the years, "would you do it all again?" and I tell them, unequivocally, yes!

I am excited for the future of the profession, and as we grow, we must continually reinvent ourselves to anticipate, and not just respond to, the trends in health care that may influence our practice. Most importantly, we must continue to provide client-centred care regardless of setting and circumstance.

Thank you CDHA for initiating this moment of reflection. It is always important to reflect on the past, however briefly, as it encourages us to refocus on our future.



▲ Arlynn providing oral hygiene services to a young client in 1995  
Source: *Probe*, Volume 30, Number 1 (1996), pp. 22–23.

### CHEERS TO ALL INDEPENDENT PRACTICE PROFESSIONALS, PAST AND PRESENT!

CDHA congratulates you on this most significant milestone! There is no doubt you have faced many challenges along the way and sacrificed much to make your dreams a reality. You are role models and true examples of the spirit of entrepreneurship, and your success has helped not only to advance the profession, but more importantly, to improve access to oral health care for the Canadian public. On this the 25th anniversary of independent dental hygiene practice in Canada, know that we appreciate each and every one of you for having bravely forged your own paths so that others may follow. Cheers to the continued growth of independent practice over the next 25 years, extending all across this nation.