

# Professional Practice



## Serving as a Dental Hygienist in the Canadian Armed Forces

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CDHA members are often interested in alternate career paths in dental hygiene. Our new Professional Practice column features members who are employed in non-traditional settings and provides insight and information on what you might need if you are considering a similar path.

Once my children had reached school age, I knew it was time to search for a career that would be both diverse and gratifying. I had the desire to work in some capacity in health care, which led me to investigate the dental and medical fields for job opportunities. With my husband's position as a dental assistant in the Canadian Armed Forces, I was naturally drawn to the dental field.

In 1997, at 29 years of age, I graduated from a condensed accredited Level II dental assisting program. I immediately found the work to be very rewarding and diverse but it was also an occupation that was quite demanding on my family, as working hours would often coincide with family time. I learned of the direct-entry program for dental assistants to join the Canadian Armed Forces and signed on the dotted line on December 14, 2000. At that time my dental assistant career was trumped by my military career. While further developing my dental assisting skills within the military dental clinics, I was also required to become proficient in soldiering skills, military directives, policies, and orders.

As my military career progressed, my responsibilities also increased but I found this all rather rewarding. When I reached the rank of sergeant in 2008, I realized more and more that my clinical time was mostly being replaced by administrative and management duties. I felt that I was not ready to give up my passion for client care in favour of an administrative role, which was going to be the next step in my military career. Hence, in October 2011, I chose to apply to a dental hygiene program, which would allow me to return to full-time client care. I graduated in May 2014 from Algonquin College, Ottawa, with an advanced diploma in dental hygiene and was eager to establish myself as a registered dental hygienist within the military. My military career, however, did not stop and my promotion to warrant officer meant that I had to divide my clinical treatment time to make room for administrative tasks as well. In June 2017, I was appointed the position of professional practice leader for dental hygiene within the Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC).

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*Serving as a Dental Hygienist in the Canadian Armed Forces...cont'd***Q What do you like best about your job?**

**A** The diversity that my career provides is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job as it is why I look forward to going to work each day. I have had the privilege to deploy on both domestic and international operations during my career where I acquired an immense knowledge base and proficiency in many areas of dentistry, including forensic odontology and assisting oral surgery in a combat zone. The military environment fosters and encourages my professional growth not only as a military member but also as a dental hygienist.

**Q Describe your typical day?**

**A** At this point in my career, a typical day involves performing a variety of tasks and functions that often depend on the circumstance at hand. As the senior dental hygienist within the clinic I oversee civilian and military dental hygienists, lead, co-lead or supervise the dental hygiene/periodontal program, and I also treat clients. In my role as the dental hygiene practice leader, I research and provide guidance to military dental personnel on dental hygiene-related questions and queries. At the rank of warrant officer, I am expected to mentor junior military members and to assist with their personal and professional development.

**Q How are you making a difference?**

**A** As a dental hygienist, I feel I make a difference every day in caring for and working with our military clients to help them achieve better overall health. Furthermore, in my position as a practice leader, I have the privilege to influence change and ensure the dental hygiene profession within the military is continuously evolving. Finally, from my experiences as a military member, dental assistant, and dental hygienist, I am also able to provide guidance on a variety of subjects.

**Q What would you tell someone considering a career as a military dental hygienist?**

**A** If someone were to consider a career as a dental hygienist within the military, my advice would be to seek out and speak with a military dental hygienist to see if the lifestyle is right for them. It is important to understand the commitment one makes when becoming a member of two professions, one as a dental hygienist and the other as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Q If you're considering a career in the military, who should you contact to find out what qualities are desired in applicants?**

**A** It is always best to speak to a recruiter. These are trained personnel who will be able to provide up-to-date information on trade and professional requirements. [www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/caf-jobs/talk-to-a-recruiter.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/caf-jobs/talk-to-a-recruiter.html)

In closing, my career choices have presented me with opportunities I could not have imagined. Serving as a dental hygienist in the Canadian Armed Forces has been an outstanding, extremely satisfying profession for me. •



▲ Andrea Plante with Tricia Soucy-Phillips (RDH Petawawa) in a Chinook helicopter.