A Legacy of Leadership in Dental Hygiene at UCSF

Early Successes of the Class of 2012 Master of Science in Dental Hygiene

By Mary Sornborger Porteous, DH’75, MS’12, and Barbara Heckman, RDH, MS

The UC San Francisco tradition (1919-2005) of producing dental hygiene graduates who will be leaders in the profession has bridged a seven-year hiatus with the initiation of the first graduate degree of its kind in California. The UCSF Master of Science in Dental Hygiene (MS-DH) program was developed, in part, to meet the current demand for exemplary dental hygiene educators and administrators in California and the nation.

Margaret Walsh, RDH, MS, EdD, the late Bill Bird, DDS, DPH, Dean Featherstone and many others worked diligently to see this program to fruition. In June 2011, Program Director Margaret Walsh, Barbara Heckman RDH, MS, and Dorothy Rowe, RDH, MS, PhD – aided by the faculty of the School of Dentistry and the Graduate Division – implemented a curriculum designed to prepare graduate learners to engage in multidisciplinary problem solving related to oral disease prevention and oral health promotion in varied populations. The program strives to be consistent with the missions of UCSF and the Department of Preventive and Restorative Dental Sciences (PRDS): to advance health worldwide through education, discovery and patient care. The MS-DH program goals are to prepare graduates to assume roles as educators and research collaborators in academic, public health or oral health care-related industry settings. In addition, the program emphasizes leadership and continued advanced education.

In the 11 months since graduation, our inaugural class has accrued accomplishments reflecting these MS-DH program goals. The early successes of our first cohort of 12 graduates (the Class of 2012) are summarized below according to intended program outcomes. Furthermore, some examples of additional postgraduation scholarly achievements are highlighted.

Five of the MS-DH graduates are making significant contributions as dental hygiene educators in three community colleges (Chabot, Diablo Valley and Foothill) and two universities (UCSF and USC). Graduates holding faculty appointments are Liz Couch, Ruth Kearn, Michaela Nguyen, Elena Ortega and Joyce Sumi. In addition, the majority of the inaugural class delivered invited presentations to learners in courses helping to address oral health promotion/disease prevention, and taught dental hygiene-related subjects in a variety of settings. Furthermore, presentations also included opportunities to engender collaboration through interdisciplinary education. Graduates supporting curricula through their work include Serai Graham, Uyen Nguyen, Ellen Darius, Diane Dodd, Nicolette Moultrie, Mary Sornborger Porteous and Kirsten Jarvi, in addition to those with faculty appointments.

Ellen Darius is currently an investigator for the UCSF Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN), providing research collaboration for the CAMBRA study in an East Bay dental practice. Dissemination of the graduates’ scholarly work has been occurring in a number of forms. Research collaboration has resulted in six publications in refereed journals; co-authors include Couch, Dodd, Jarvi, Ortega (twice) and Sornborger Porteous.

Some of our proudest moments were firsts in dissemination recognition. Our first graduate to receive an award at UCSF Research and Clinical Excellence Day was Joyce Sumi. She was awarded third place for her poster presentation on “Palliative Oral Care: Perceptions of Long-Term Care Certified Nursing Assistants.”

Additional firsts were accomplished with Nicolette Moultrie’s national presentations: her first was a poster presentation at the American Dental Hygienists’ Association (ADHA) Annual Session, and her second was an oral presentation of her interprofessional research collaboration entitled “Translating Research to Practice: Implementing Fluoride Varnish During Well-Child Visits in a Primary Care Safety-Net System” at the American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting and Exposition.

Moultrie has also realized our goal to prepare graduates to assume roles as leaders/administrators and research collaborators in public health – first, through her appointment as the program manager for the Contra Costa County Children’s Oral Health Program, and second, through her appointment by Gov. Brown to serve...
on the Dental Hygiene Committee of California (DHCC). The committee's responsibilities include all aspects of licensure, as well as adopting regulations, determining fees and setting continuing education requirements for all dental hygiene licensure categories. We applaud the leadership that Moultrie demonstrates in these positions.

Our graduates have also reached out locally (Dodd and Kearn) and globally (Couch) to provide dental hygiene care and expertise as oral disease preventive specialists to underserved populations. Liz Couch was selected for interprofessional collaboration aboard the USNS Mercy hospital ship, delivering care for populations in North Vietnam and Cambodia.

Kirsten Jarvi is currently making a contribution to oral health care industry as a project consultant with Interleukin Genetics, building their in-house technology platform and designing marketing materials for the launch of their major risk assessment test (for IL-1α and IL-1β) for the oral health market.

Three members of the first MS-DH class are considering doctoral education as a next step in their professional evolution. Faculty have encouraged graduates to pursue advanced education. Indeed, our vision for the future includes a UCSF doctoral program in dental hygiene.

As evidenced by these accomplishments, the graduates of the inaugural Master of Science in Dental Hygiene class have already made significant steps toward achieving the program's goals. UCSF and the School of Dentistry, as well as the Graduate Division, look forward to the oral health care contributions these graduates will continue to make.

Our best ambassadors for the MS-DH program and the advancement of the dental hygiene profession are UCSF dental hygiene graduates. Although our graduates are mighty in accomplishments, they are few in number. We request the support of all UCSF alumni in spreading the word about our program's existence. Please encourage any dental hygienist interested in graduate education and our program's goals to visit our website (dentistry.ucsf.edu/hygiene) for further information about admission requirements and fees, along with an electronic application form.

For specific questions about the program, prospective applicants can contact the program administrator at msdh@ucsf.edu or call 415/502-1925. ■

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