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TOP 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR DENTAL HYGIENIST

From Spotting Eating Disorders to Screening for Oral Cancer, California's Dental Hygienists Equipped to Deliver Wide Range of Public Health Services

GLENDALE, Calif. (May 9, 2007) – These days, a visit with your dental hygienist may result in more benefits than just cleaner teeth and healthier gums – you might even decide to stop smoking, improve your nutrition or check to see if you might be at risk for diabetes.

“Most people simply don’t realize just how educated and skilled their dental hygienists are,” said Susan McLearn, president of the California Dental Hygienists’ Association (CDHA). “The profession has evolved to the point where we actually can save lives.”

In keeping with its mission to raise public awareness about dental health and to promote the value of seeing a dental hygienist, the association has issued the following list of the *Top Ten Things Californians Should Know About Their Dental Hygienists*.

“The list is intended to show how dental hygienists play such an integral role in overall public health – in many different ways and on many different levels.”

That role is reflected in the following facts about Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH):

1. Highly Educated Professionals – The minimum level of education for licensure is equivalent to a four-year degree with two years specializing in dental hygiene.

2. Committed to Expanding Access to Care – Specially licensed hygienists can go into underserved communities and provide dental hygiene services to some of the millions of Californians who would otherwise have no access to dental care.

3. Screen for Oral Cancer – Dental hygienists possess the skills to be the first health professional to identify potential signs of oral cancer and refer a patient to a physician.

4. Promote Healthy Nutrition – Dental hygienists can tell if a patient is eating poorly or is malnourished; they can then offer helpful advice and information.

5. Spot Signs of Eating Disorders – Also related to nutritional issues, eating disorders can also be recognized in the mouth during a check up.

6. Recognize Signs of Diabetes – Dental hygienists can alert patients that they might be in danger from diabetes, and refer them to seek confirmation from a medical doctor.

7. Promote Smoking Cessation – When examining patients who smoke tobacco, dental hygienists often will counsel them to quit and provide resources and information about steps they can take to stop smoking.

8. Prevent Gum and Periodontal Disease – By cleaning and examining teeth and gums, dental hygienists play a major role in preventing common oral diseases.

9. Understand the Link Between Oral Health and Emotional Health in Children – Dental hygienists are passionate about promoting good oral health among children, who can often suffer speech impediments, social ridicule, diminished self esteem and other problems related to poor oral health.

10. Represented by CDHA, the Official Voice of Dental Hygiene – Since CDHA was established 20 years ago, dental hygienists have been making continuous strides toward becoming the skilled, autonomous and essential public health professionals that they are today.

Furthermore, dental hygienists are qualified to detect a wide range of other life-threatening conditions, including high blood pressure and HIV.

“The items on our list really underscore that the mouth is a window into a person’s comprehensive health,” said CDHA’s McLearan. “And because the average person sees a hygienist more often than a physician, it is especially important for people to understand the many facets and benefits of the dental hygiene profession.”

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The California Dental Hygienists’ Association (CDHA) is the authoritative voice of the state’s dental hygiene profession. While registered dental hygienists have worked in the state for nearly a century, CDHA was established 20 years ago when two regional associations merged to form a unified professional group. CDHA represents thousands of dental hygienists throughout the state and is dedicated to expanding opportunities for the profession and access to care for all Californians.