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SUCCESSFUL ORGAN TRANSPLANTS LINKED TO SOUND ORAL HEALTH

Greater Awareness Is Critical As Number of Transplants Expected to Rise Along With the Aging Baby Boom Generation

GLENDALE, Calif. (March 15, 2007) – When Cheryl Thomas was first diagnosed with a serious kidney disease more than 10 years ago, she already knew a lot more than the average person – she was a dental hygienist, a professional who understood the important relationship between organ disease and oral health.

This link is especially important as the baby boomer generation ages and finds itself increasingly in need of organ transplants.

“Most people don’t realize everything a dental hygienist is trained to do,” said Thomas, who still practices as a dental hygienist. “Given my own illness, I have dedicated a lot of time to researching and promoting awareness about the critical role oral health plays in organ disease and transplants.”

Thomas’ story is timely because the California Dental Hygienists’ Association (CDHA) is educating the public as part of March’s *National Kidney Month* and in advance of April’s *Organ Donor’s Awareness Month*. With 3,000 organ transplants performed last year in California – a number that is rising – CDHA wants the public to know the following facts:

- Dental bacteria in the organ transplant recipient can lead to organ rejection. The dental hygienist is an excellent resource for removing oral bacteria effectively, and is the specialist when it comes to recommending the correct products (toothbrush, toothpaste, oral irrigators, and products to clean between the teeth) for our patients.
- Prior to an organ transplant, transplant candidates should be free of all infections in their body. The dental hygienist is trained to not only detect oral infection, but to identify potential signs of infection within the oral cavity.
- Organ transplant recipients often need assistance with nutritional counseling. Dental hygienists can recommend a proper diet that will benefit the patient’s oral health in addition to the rest of the body.
- Many organ transplant recipients suffer from chronic dry mouth; dental hygienist’s are an excellent resource to recommend products that can alleviate the discomfort from this condition.

- Dental hygienists can be instrumental in the early detection of bone disease – a condition is commonly seen in organ transplant recipients and known as secondary hyperparathyroidism and may be evident on dental x-rays.
- Dental bacteria that causes gingivitis, gum disease and cavities can lead to an increased incidence of pneumonia in transplant recipients and those with compromised immune systems. The dental hygienist is a specialist in teaching patients how to keep their mouths healthy and free from infection.

“In addition to increasing public understanding of these issues, we also want to remind people about the dire need for organ donations,” said Susan McLearn, a Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) and president of CDHA. “Nearly 20 people a day die each and every day while waiting for a lifesaving organ.”

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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.