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Cultivating Leadership Potential

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Guest Editorial Latest Features

Guest Editorial: Cultivating Leadership Potential

Two dental hygienists expand their professional horizons through their work with the Hispanic Dental Association.

By Diana Macri, RDH, BSDH, MEd and Margo Y. Melchor, RDH, MEd, EdD On **Aug 26, 2021**  0

The Hispanic Dental Association (HDA) was founded in 1990, and its charitable arm, the Hispanic Dental Association Foundation (HDAF), was established in 1994 as a 501(c)(3) to support the distribution of scholarships to dental, dental hygiene, and dental assistant students. To date, \$600,000 in scholarship funds have been distributed.

HDA's mission is to provide service, advocate for and educate underserved communities, and offer leadership opportunities to its members.¹ The organization's core objectives are as follows:

- Unify all Hispanic oral health professionals under one organization in order to have one voice to better serve our people and the United States.

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- Promote the oral health of the Hispanic community through prevention, treatment, and education.
- Foster research and knowledge concerning Hispanic oral health problems and their solutions.
- Disseminate information to both Hispanic dental professionals and the community at large.
- Provide a worldwide source of continuing education for oral health professionals serving the Hispanic community.
- Stimulate interest and open the pipeline for Hispanics into oral health careers.

The HDA has 12 professional chapters in Austin, Texas; Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Houston; Los Angeles; New York City; San Antonio, Texas; San Diego/Baja, California; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Washington, DC; and Western Washington. These chapters host continuing education events, coordinate community outreach programs, and advocate for the dental professions. There are also 46 student HDA chapters (some that include dental hygiene students and residents), as well as a few dental hygiene student chapters. The HDA has collaborated with the American Dental Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, and other nonprofit organizations to advance mutual goals. Most recently, it has partnered with the National Dental Association and the Society of American Indian Dentists to form the Diverse Dental Society, whose mission is to support minority oral health professionals and enhance the service, education, leadership, and advocacy of each organization.

Organized Dentistry

Organized dentistry refers to “the combined efforts of all the organizations that work positively to contribute to the dental profession.”² These organizations serve many roles, not the least of which is to advance the dental professions and better serve the public. The American Dental Hygienists’ Association represents dental hygienists in the US; however, it is not the only professional organization that provides leadership and advocacy opportunities for dental hygienists. The HDA’s members include dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, office managers, and dental/dental hygiene students. This type of diversity strengthens organizations, enhances creativity and problem-solving abilities, and stimulates innovation.

Relevance

By 2060, racial and ethnic minorities will constitute the majority of the US population. Bringing adequate representation of diverse societal groups, especially vulnerable populations, will be essential if all Americans are to benefit from improvements in the prevention and treatment of serious medical conditions. Advocating for improvements in Hispanic oral health outcomes does not require a Hispanic lineage. The HDA is open to any dental team member (dentist, dental hygienist, dental therapist, dental assistant, office manager, etc) who wants to help others. In addition to former president Y. M. Acosta, RDH, MA, CDE, other dental

hygienists have stepped up to lead the HDA, including past presidents Josephine Rosa, RDH, (first dental hygienist to serve as HDA president); Martha Baez, RDH, MPH; and Kathy Alvarez, RDH, MS.

Rosa Chaviano-Moran, DMD, FICD, current HDA president, invites all dental hygienists to join. “We need your input and expertise. HDA will provide you with empowerment and mentorship opportunities in an intraprofessional and collaborative environment. After this extremely difficult year, let’s work together to push our communities forward. It’s a great time to join our association, membership is open to all; it’s not about being Hispanic/Latinx, it’s about the communities we want to impact and serve,” Chaviano-Moran exhorts.

To learn more about the HDA, visit: hdassoc.org.

United in Service

Diana Macri, RDH, BSDH, MSEd

When I first graduated from dental hygiene school in 1995, I was focused on beginning my clinical practice journey. Anxious to apply all I had learned, I devoted my time and energy to improving my diagnostic and clinical skills for many years. It wasn’t until much later in my career that I gave thought to the service component of this profession. I realized I had never used my knowledge and expertise outside of the operatory, and that those skills were valuable and desperately needed by many who couldn’t access them.

At around the same time, I began a tenure track position at a dental hygiene program in the South Bronx, New York. In this environment, I remembered the importance of giving back to the community and I searched for like-minded professionals who could serve as partners. It was then that I found the Hispanic Dental Association (HDA). As a Latina (I was born in Puerto Rico and my extended family still resides there), I was very interested in promoting my heritage, meeting other Hispanic professionals, and working together to resolve the oral health disparities experienced by Hispanic populations.

When I joined the HDA in 2014, I was immediately invigorated by the energy of New York chapter President Luz Marina Aguirre, DMD. With her gentle mentorship, I was inspired to pursue leadership positions and went on to serve as secretary and treasurer of the New York chapter, as well as become a member of the National Board of Trustees and chair of the communications committee. These positions taught me a great deal about organizational management and gave me an opportunity to advocate for the dental hygiene profession on a national level. Many times, I was the only dental hygienist in the room, speaking passionately on the need to support legislation that expanded scope of practice (which has to be done to

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improved oral health outcomes for communities of color). More recently, I was invited to join the HDA Foundation, working with a group of professionals who have long been committed to the association's mission.

A Presidential Tale

Margo Y. Melchor, RDH, MEd, EdD

My Hispanic Dental Association (HDA) leadership story began with my serving as the faculty advisor for the University of Texas (UT) Health School of Dentistry at Houston Hispanic Student Dental Association, which led to becoming a founding member and president of the Greater Houston HDA. These opportunities opened the door to an invitation to sit on the HDA's Board of Trustees. In 2011-2012, I had the honor of serving as president of the HDA. I was only the third dental hygienist to ever serve in this role in the history of the organization. During my tenure on the executive committee, I was dedicated to identifying and recruiting other dental hygienists to serve on the Board of Trustees to foster the team concept and inclusivity. As the faculty advisor of the Hispanic Student Dental Association at UT Health School of Dentistry, I was able to recognize students and professional members whom I felt would be great assets and contributors to the organization. During that time, I had the privilege of mentoring and assisting students and professional members who went on to become future leaders of the HDA.

Vision for the Future

My vision for the HDA is for it to stay true to its mission of being an inclusive organization (as no other dental organization is) by increasing the number of dental hygienists serving on the Board of Trustees. After Diana Macri, RDH, BSDH, MEd, was appointed to the board, a few years passed before another dental hygienist, Carlos Sanchez, RDH, BSDH, MPH, occupied a seat on the Board of Trustees. Currently, there are no dental hygienists serving on the board or executive committee. As an HDA Foundation board member, I can attest to the group's dedication to inclusivity and how essential it is in sustaining relationships and engaging in innovation to support the future of the organization.

As director of community outreach for the UT Health School of Dentistry, I am privileged to seek, coordinate, and implement partnerships to provide uninsured, underserved individuals with dental care via our mobile dental van program, community service learning, and outreach events. In addition, as associate professor in the Department of Periodontics and Dental Hygiene, I teach dental hygiene and dental students in clinical and geriatric subjects. Also, I am the director of the applied science course within the residency programs.

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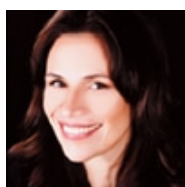
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I am truly blessed to work with great colleagues and serve in previous & professional, educational, collaborative, and leadership roles.

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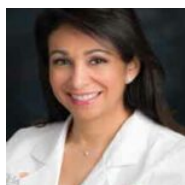
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Margo Y. Melchor, RDH, MEd, EdD

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