

## A New Era in Periodontology

At its 89th meeting in San Francisco in September, the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) ushered in a very forward-thinking vision for year 2020—and with it the recognition of the important part dental hygienists will have in both the Academy's vision and in improving the oral health care of the public. Originally introduced at its Hurricane Isadore-interrupted meeting in New Orleans last year, the AAP's 2020 Vision merits the attention of hygienists who endeavor to practice according to the current science of periodontology.

### AAP Dental Hygiene Symposium

The San Francisco meeting was a gold mine in continuing education. Course offerings for hygienists were varied and comprehensive in scope. Presentations on the relationship between cardiovascular and periodontal disease, the role of genetic testing in the management of patients with chronic periodontitis, and the treatment implications of periodontal systemic links—just to name a few—were excellent.

Yet what may be one of the Academy's greatest strokes of genius was the inauguration of the first 1-day symposium specifically designed for dental hygienists. The symposium was the forum for renowned experts in dental hygiene and periodontics to share relevant information, including theories on periodontal-systemic association, implant therapy, antimicrobials, patient self care, technological advances in periodontology, new periodontal surgical procedures, and how to meet patient expectations. With an audience of 1,000 hygienists, this level of attendance would seem to speak volumes in terms of the number of hygienists who have a desire to increase their knowledge base in periodontics.

At the close of the dental hygiene symposium, the new president of the AAP, Dr. Michael Rethman, announced that the Academy planned to hold the 2nd Annual Dental Hygiene Symposium at next year's AAP meeting in Orlando. It was then that I knew that the Academy had taken note of the show of hygienists who were starving for reliable, scientific information and ready to apply that science to everyday practice. Finally, the "Sahara Desert experience" relative to continuing education opportunities for hygienists who aspire to practice as periodontal therapists, might soon be addressed.

### A Vision for the Future

One of the most compelling messages at the meeting was the Academy's vision for the next 15 years. To guide the direction of their vision for 2020, the AAP performed an environmental scan that gathered information from its membership, industry experts, and various reports and source materials. Some of the trends that were identified

by the environmental scan give us some significant cues for everyday practice.

In terms of the kind of patients we will see in 2020, they "will be more prevention oriented and concerned about health and wellness. They will be informed consumers of oral care, aware of the 'value' of treatment. They will be interested in comfort and cosmetics."<sup>1</sup>

In terms of periodontics and dentistry during the next 15 years, we need to recognize several trends. "There is likely to be less periodontitis and the disease that exists will be less severe. There will be more general dentists and hygienists involved in the prevention and treatment of periodontal diseases, and other specialists will attempt procedures traditionally done by periodontists. There may be fewer applicants to dental school and fewer dentists choosing the specialties. The specialties will be less autonomous and more collaborative."<sup>1</sup>

In terms of general trends in periodontics within health care over the next 15 years, "Physicians will be more aware of the importance of good oral health and are likely to be reimbursed for performing dental procedures."<sup>1</sup> [Author's Note: That's an interesting thought.]

As part of its Vision 2020, the AAP has differentiated the roles and responsibilities of periodontists and clinicians in general practice. The Academy's vision recognizes the need for general dentists and dental hygienists to evaluate, treatment plan, and manage most slight to moderate periodontal diseases, with periodontists treating severe periodontitis and periodontal conditions related to overall systemic health.

As our knowledge base regarding periodontal-systemic links becomes more advanced and the incidence of multifactorial disease syndromes increases, it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of referrals to periodontists of patients with systemic considerations. It is also believed that medical protocols will start to include periodontal evaluation, and there will be increased opportunities to collaborate more with the medical community in patient care and research. Additionally, it is anticipated that periodontists' practice time dedicated to advanced surgical procedures will increase and that periodontal specialty programs will be more focused on advanced surgical techniques, including oral plastic surgery.



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Casey is a periodontal therapist subcontractor in the Washington DC/Baltimore area and founder of PointPerio, LLC, a consulting firm committed to coaching general dentists and hygienists in progressive periodontal therapeutics within a collaborative framework. She is a member of the American Dental Hygienists' Association. Casey lectures nationally on the role of the periodontal therapist in general practice and regularly contributes practice management articles to Dentist's Money Digest. She welcomes comments and visitors to her Website [www.pointperio.com](http://www.pointperio.com).

One of the long-term goals of Vision 2020 is that periodontology will be the central component of all predoctoral and dental hygiene education. In our discussion of undergraduate education, Dr. Rethman advised that the AAP "stands ready" to assist dental hygiene educators with information that may bolster their curriculum. When asked about the potential for AAP outreach to already practicing hygienists, specifically those who aspire to practice as periodontal therapists, Dr. Rethman suggested several educational opportunities.

- Logging onto the AAP Web site at [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org), which posts the Academy's position papers and other valuable resources.
- A series of video tapes on various topics the AAP has developed, which can be purchased through the AAP Web site or by contacting Mobiltape Company, Inc. (Valencia, Calif, [www.mobiltape.com](http://www.mobiltape.com)) directly.
- Reaching out to periodontists within your community for information, help, and case collaboration.
- Attendance at future academy meetings.

### The Future Is Now

The sum total of this kind of professional interrelationship is better patient care. When asked whether the AAP plans to offer associate memberships to hygienists (as the AAP currently offers to general dentists), Dr. Rethman answered, "We need to remember that the Academy's vision is for the year 2020. We can't do everything overnight, and [we] will continue to be thoughtful in making strategic decisions that will help design a future that benefits both patients and practitioners. Meanwhile, valuable Academy resources available on the Web, through the *Journal of Periodontology*, and at AAP meetings are available to both AAP members and nonmembers alike."

The mantra of AAP leadership at the San Francisco meeting was that "the future is now." What does that really mean? Could it be that the Academy has realized that periodontal therapists are uniquely positioned to help them achieve their vision? It seems so. It also seems apparent that the Academy is willing to help us attain the knowledge we need to practice at a more scientific level. With this kind of momentum, the Academy's potential to achieve its vision and hygienists' potential to excel in nonsurgical periodontics may become realities. The combination suggests professional synergies that could usher in a new era in periodontology. Hygienists who practice at the level of periodontal therapist should embrace this new era. I believe we will. **COH**

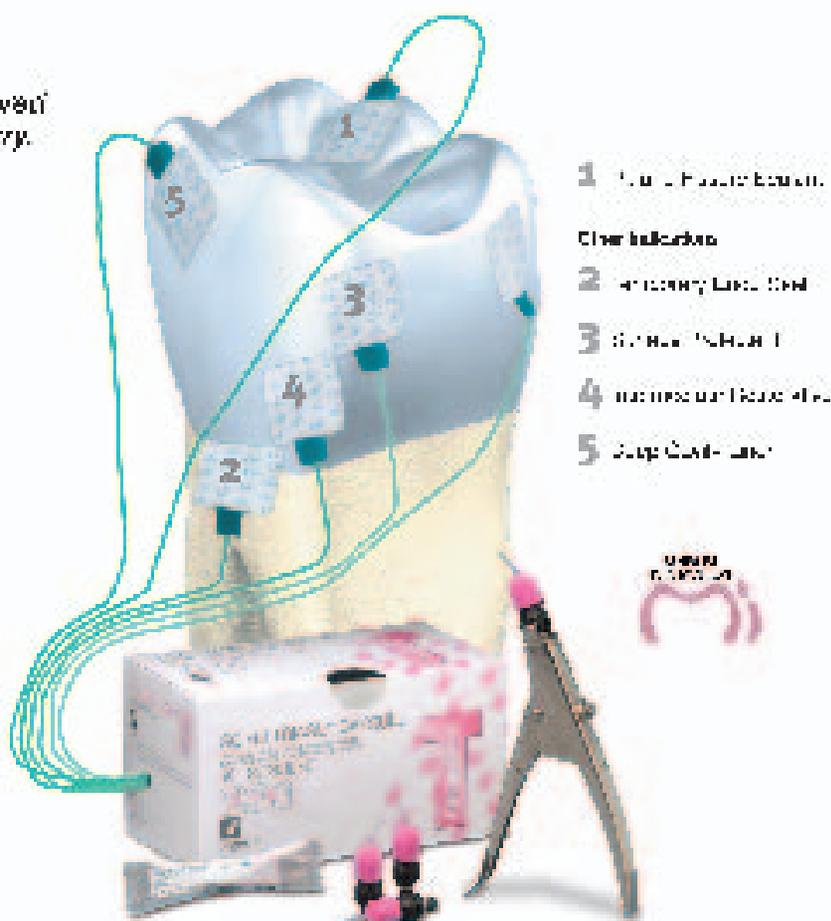
### Reference

1. The American Academy of Periodontology 2020 Vision. Mar 2003. Available at: <http://www.perio.org/about/2020vision.htm>. Accessed Oct 29, 2003.

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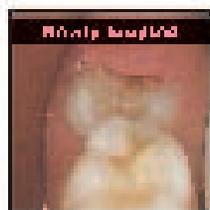
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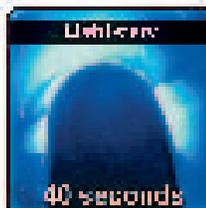
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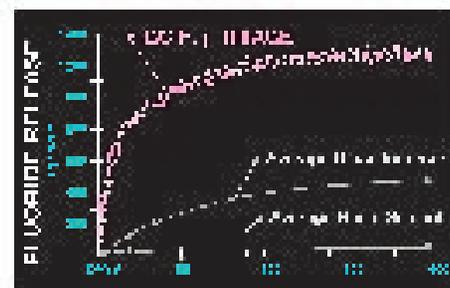


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