Dental Hygiene Around the World

MÁRIO RUI ARAÚJO, RDH, BSDH, M. PSYCH.

1. **Tell us about the overall state of oral health in your country.**
   According with 2005 data, Portugal DMF at 6 years old was 2.1 with 51% children caries free; at 12 years old DMF was 1.48 with 44% of them caries free. If we look back for the 1984 data we moved from: at 6 years old, a DMF of 5.4 to 2.1 and at 12 years old from 3.7 to 1.48. I believe we are doing a good job preventing dental caries and improving health. Right now we are doing the 3rd national oral health survey and I am very excited to see the results. I will tell you later.

2. **Tell us something we don’t know about dental hygiene in your country.**
   In Portugal we are doing a great journey in dental hygiene. First of all we call it Oral Hygiene, we believe (at least in Portuguese we can say that) Oral is a more global approach in terms of Oral health, so we are, in fact, Oral Hygienists.

   We have a good relation with dentists, I think, the majority of them, understand how important is to work as a team and all the efforts we are doing in increasing oral health literacy, creating oral health awareness in taking care of patients quality of life. Looking around oral health was never so important as it is in the present social scenario.

3. **What’s the best job you’ve ever had in or related to dental hygiene?**
   I had two! The first one is to be a teacher in Dental Hygiene field. I love to teach clinical and communication skills. The second one is to work for the Portuguese Directorate-General for Health be part of this national agency and have the opportunity to serve my country by working on key projects to national oral health.

4. **When was dental hygiene as a career introduced in your country? How have you seen it change over the years?**
   Dental Hygiene starts in 1984 and Norma Wells, from the University of Washington, Seattle, created the career philosophy and the main educational background.

   We start with no degree and now the dental hygiene program is a 3 years bachelor degree program. There are 3 schools in Portugal and we start to have masters and PhD dental hygienists. We are doing well in educating the profession.

5. **What’s the biggest obstacle your country faces regarding dental hygiene?**
   We have around 500 dental hygienists in Portugal and we are still struggling to improve oral health cultural background in the general population and health professionals. So, for some patients is still “strange” to have a “dental hygiene” appointment.

   Besides that, Portugal has 7 dental schools and there are many dentists on the market, so in a full market and because is not so productive any more, it starts to become difficult to find a spot for dental hygienists.

6. **What is the biggest complaint among hygienists in your country?**
   The lack of jobs and opportunities for young hygienists!

7. **What do you hope to see in the dental hygiene field in the next 10 years?**
   I would love to see dental hygienists more and more worried with oral health than “hygiene”, more health coaches then “cleaners”. I would love to see more and more oral health teams working together improving oral health and improving quality of life...
8. **How do hygienists in your country give back to their community? How often do hygienists in your country give back on average?**
   We have a huge career in the government. In Portugal, more than 100 dental hygienists are working in community oral health for the ministry of health. We have this huge school oral health program with lot’s of activities and projects to continuously improve oral health of young people. It’s very common for all hygienist to work for his or her communities, helping on schools or nursery homes. In fact, half of our educational curriculum is about community oral health, so, we are, in fact, very public health persons.

9. **What is the estimated total number of hygienists currently employed in your country?**
   535 in 2012.

10. **What does the average hygienist make in salary per year?**
    A dental hygienist can have a salary around 18.000€ if they have a few years in the career, if you start right now, around 11.000€, in average.

    As a clinic dental hygienist it can change a lot but the range will be between 18.000 and 25.000 € year.