



Twelve days of hygiene

☆ On the first day of hygiene my true love said to me: I've never seen you so excited. Finally, you've received your license, passed your board exams and will now be paid for doing what you love to do.

☆ On the second day of hygiene my true love said to me: Maybe it was a fluke that your first day was so busy. All first days are harried. I know it's different than school. You'll get used to it and you'll pick up speed once you're there awhile. I'm sure it's normal for them to give you 30 minutes per cleaning.

You need to remember the 'new graduate' feeling.

☆ On the third day of hygiene my true love said to me: I didn't realize that when the dentist hired you to do "cleanings" it meant cleaning the office, too.

☆ On the fourth day of hygiene my true love said to me: Are there any health insurance papers that we need to fill out? What about your retirement plan? I'm sure the doctor will give you the details; he's just busy for the first week.

☆ On the fifth day of hygiene my true love said to me: What do you mean there aren't enough ultrasonic tips? The office probably has several new sets ordered for you and they just haven't come in yet.

☆ On the sixth day of hygiene my true love said to me: A patient thanked you for helping her with proper brushing techniques and being so gentle with her child? I bet that made you feel good about yourself.

☆ On the seventh day of hygiene my true love said to me: Oral cancer screening? I didn't know you did that. You could have saved that man's life today. You're amazing.

☆ On the eighth day of hygiene my true love said to me: What do you mean you found cavities in your patient's mouth after the doctor examined him? But he's the dentist!

☆ On the ninth day of hygiene my true love said to me: Why don't you ask someone in the office to help you? The other staff members must have similar struggles and they'd be happy to help you. Jealousy is all in your mind.

☆ On the tenth day of hygiene my true love said to me: Honey, you are having a staff meeting before your day begins, right? At least you're getting paid for early hours and overtime.

☆ On the eleventh day of hygiene my true love said to me: I'm sorry to hear that your neck and back are hurting. I'm sure the dentist has provided proper equipment; it must be that you're having a bad day.

☆ On the twelfth day of hygiene my true love said to me: Ah, your paycheck. Doesn't it make all of this worth while? Keep this up for 30 years and we should have a great retirement, especially with all of the benefits and rewards you've been promised.

☆ ... and a partridge in a pear tree.

Does any of this sound familiar? This is the time of year when things wind down, yet the stress of the holidays gears up. Patience may be low, but our glucose level may be very high. What are you doing to care for yourself? Are you in danger of burning out?

Burnout is characterized by a lack of energy, emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, negativity, reduced resistance to illnesses, increased work absenteeism, poor job performance, and isolation. Stress can sometimes be a good thing that motivates, energizes, and helps us do our best work. It is the unrelieved work stress that can lead to burnout. How do you find the spirit you had when you graduated from hygiene school? I'd like to offer some ideas to help you overcome burnout.

First, you need to remember the "new graduate" feeling. Find a quiet place and remember what it was like to pass the national boards or receive your license in the mail. Hang on to that feeling and remember the pride, the sense of accomplishment, and the empowered edge you felt.

Define the activities you enjoy about dental hygiene. Is it the clinical debridement? Or is it listening to your patients' health concerns, and offering your professional insight such as smoking cessation tips or mammogram reminders?

Is writing about dental hygiene issues satisfying for you? Put your passion to paper and see what you come

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up with. Write an article for your component or state's newsletter.

Does education feed your spirit? A few years ago when local anesthesia was brought to my state, I was one of the first to take the course. There I met Margaret Fehrenbach, RDH, MS, creator of *The Velvet Touch* and author of head and neck anatomy textbooks. Margaret gave me the opportunity to be a clinical instructor for her courses. The joy of sharing what I learned was rewarding.

Expanding into other avenues of dental hygiene can prevent burnout. See what's out there. Becoming a member of the ADHA is a must in preventing burnout. If you are not a member of your professional organization, how can you tap into the goals of your profession and the many options out there for you to explore? Don't have a component near you? Start one!

Check out Amy Neives' Web site exchange at www.amyrdh.com. Join hygienists across the country who ask questions on a daily basis about all aspects of dental hygiene. The answers are immediate. Whether it's patient concerns or work-related problems, no one knows more about what you're going through than other dental hygienists.

Make your workplace a calm corner of the office. Place photos or pictures where you and your patients can enjoy them. Provide soothing light and sounds. Change the dental aromas in the office.

And at the end of the day, schedule one more patient — *you!* Add one hour to your day before going home and facing more responsibilities. Go to an exercise class, cardio, yoga, or pilates. If no one is at home before you, take a hot bath, especially during these winter months.

Re-evaluate your current job situation, be proactive, and overcome negative thoughts. If your job seems like a job, take action and look for a work environment that feeds your spirit. Burnout is often caused by not knowing what we want, yet killing ourselves to get it.

Define the workplace activities you enjoy, then look for a job that provides those activities. When your job is fun, you won't think of it as work.

Try this exercise. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side write down the activities you enjoy in dental hygiene, and on the right side list the activities you detest. Choose one activity from the right side and make an action plan to eliminate it. Then choose one from the left side and determine ways to enhance it.

Last, but not least, become a volunteer. Schools, health fairs, libraries, public health settings, rural areas — many are untouched by preventive dental hygiene. The laws are slowly opening up opportunities for dental hygienists to work without supervision.

Two volunteers are standouts. During Hurricane Katrina, some of our fellow dental hygienists were without

jobs and living in states where they were not licensed. Two hygienists stepped up to the plate to help them — Anne Guignon and Amy Neives. Through their Web sites they requested the help of hygienists throughout the world, and the monies went directly to the victim's bank accounts. The last I heard, nearly \$10,000 was distributed to these hygienists and their families.

We are blessed to have each other and this fine community of loving and nurturing professionals. Peace to you all and may 2006 help you recognize your abundant blessings.