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RDH to BSDH Degree Completion Program

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I was only 20 years old when I graduated from the Dental Hygiene program at Bergen Community College (BCC) in 2002. At the time, I did not feel it was necessary to pursue a Bachelor's degree. I specifically remember telling people that I was never going to teach, or work in the corporate world, so I did not need a Bachelor's degree. Fast forward 15 years down the road, and I can't help but wish I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my Bachelor's when I graduated BCC.

In 2014, I began to feel a shift in my professional life. I started exploring the dental hygiene community to see what opportunities were out there to help me improve as a dental hygienist. In 2015, I had the honor of being on the Colgate Oral Health Advisory Board. I left our board meeting feeling rejuvenated, valued and empowered.

Being a part of the COHA Board has led to many professional opportunities. In addition, it brought mentors into my life who began encouraging me to further my education. My professional life has been impacted tremendously by the Dental Hygienists who have been mentoring me over the past two years. I had been thinking about going back to school, but the encouragement from my mentors solidified the necessity for me to return to school.

I began the RDH to BSDH program at Wichita State University in August 2016; I was so incredibly nervous! This past year being enrolled in school has taught me so much. I have discovered that I am extremely passionate about encouraging dental hygiene students to continue their education. The lack of mentorship I had as a young Hygienist, has become a driving force to encourage and empower the students I encounter.

When I consider promoting our profession I cannot help but think about how important mentoring relationships are. Because of the encouragement of my mentors, I returned to

school and began running of my professional goals. I want to be a hygienist who promotes our profession through mentoring relationships. When we invest in mentoring relationships we empower dental hygienists to have a rewarding career in dental hygiene. I also believe we begin to see the following,

- Dental hygienists valuing the importance of being a member of the ADHA.
- A lot less burn out.
- An increase in hygienists who further their education.
- More dental hygienist becoming qualified educators.

These are just some of the ways I believe mentoring relationships could promote our profession.

Mentorship does not just benefit the mentee. I have a patient who I am currently mentoring as she pursues dental hygiene. We have been talking for years about her desire to become a dental hygienist. Now as she has been accepted to BCC, and prepares to begin her education, she has been shadowing me at my office. We have had a lot of conversations about school and her future in this profession. I can see the impact it is having on her, but I can also feel the impact it is having on me professionally.

The greatest impact I feel I will have on our profession is to encourage other hygienists to develop mentor relationships. I often encourage others to seek out a mentor, or mentee, to help increase their motivation as a dental hygienist. My mentor relationships have reminded me what it was like to be in the early stage of this profession, why I chose this profession and have helped me to step out of the box so that I may explore all that this profession has in store for me. Getting back to our roots is a good way to stay positive and encouraged when the

everyday tasks of the job can easily distract us. I truly believe if we invest in one another through mentor relationships, we will see an increased sense of value and purpose among the dental hygiene profession.