



## Inside Dental Assisting — July/August 2011

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### Caring For Kids

Rhea Haugseth, DMD

The AAPD is a great resource for dental assistants interested in pediatric dentistry.

It is a special thing to work with kids and it takes a team of very special people who love children to work with them. Every day I get to see how a beautiful smile, after it has been restored, can make a child blossom.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), with its 8,000 members, is the recognized authority in pediatric oral health. It has a robust allied membership that is open to hygienists, dental assistants, nurses, and other auxiliary personnel.

Rhea Haugseth, DMD, the president of the AAPD, explains how membership can benefit dental assistants. "We are very strong advocates for the dental team and the concept of the dental home, and dental assistants are such a critical part of that. We help engage them as much as we can and assist them with their education process, so, indeed, they are a critical part of our membership."

In 2001, the AAPD developed an oral health policy on the dental home, which was modeled after the medical home for pediatricians. "That was a huge accomplishment for us, and later the ADA recognized the dental home as being a very critical concept for children. Children who have a dental home are much more likely to receive appropriate preventive, therapeutic, and restorative care—and every dental assistant knows how important preventive care is," Dr. Haugseth says.

The AAPD recommends that children begin dental visits when their first tooth erupts or by their first birthday. At the first visit, dental assistants have an excellent opportunity to educate the parents or caregivers on good home oral hygiene practices and how to reduce the risk of their child developing oral disease and/or dental decay. In Dr. Haugseth's own dental practice, "Our dental assistants are the ones who are truly quite adept and wonderful on having those conversations and demonstrating the importance of good oral hygiene to the parents. We are really proud of that."

The AAPD strongly supports and advocates for the concept of the dental team. "We know that by expanding the number and type of procedures that can be done by dental assistants we can free up the dentist, enabling the dental team to provide more care to more children. We know this is a good way to utilize the dental assistant, especially in pediatrics. If you've ever worked with children, you know we never leave them alone in the operatory once their treatment has begun. In fact, most of the time I rely on my dental assistants to help keep the children calm, cool, and collected. That allows the dentist to come in, do the work, and move on to the next patient," Dr. Haugseth elaborates.

The AAPD is taking active steps to include dental assistants in the dental team concept by providing educational opportunities that it believes will help assistants raise their skill sets to perform duties that may be allowed in their individual states. Last year they offered the very first course for dental assistants on sedation, and Dr. Haugseth reports that it was very well attended and received. "We know that techniques can be taught to the dental assistants that they can perform if their individual state allows it," she explains.

Pediatric dentistry holds many opportunities today, especially in light of the recent healthcare reforms. "Kids are in the forefront of healthcare reform and taking care of them is very important," Dr. Haugseth emphasizes. "Access to care is very important and it is our job to do whatever we can to help all children get quality dental care. There are so many opportunities in pediatrics. It's fun, easygoing, yet fast-paced. I think someone who has that personality—who loves children and looks for fun—would be a great personality type to work in pediatrics."

Dr. Haugseth emphasizes that an important aspect of being a dental assistant in a pediatric dental practice is the fact that it requires different behavior guidance skills than would be used in a general family practice. "Tell-show-do is probably the most common one that we use and that our dental assistants use," she explains. "Many other behavior guidance techniques are done solely by the dentist, but tell-show-do is very critical in working with

pediatric patients. Kids tend not to be very trusting when they visit the dental office, so that is something that you need to learn in order for them to trust you. What does it take to be a great pediatric dental assistant? Getting in there and developing your own bag of tricks that work for you—and that just takes experience.”

For Dr. Haugseth, pediatric dentistry has been an incredibly rewarding experience. “It is a special thing to work with kids and it takes a team of very special people who love children to work with them. Every day I get to see how a beautiful smile, after it has been restored, can make a child blossom. It impacts the rest of that child’s life, and it is a real pleasure to be able to do that for them.”

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