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Media Release

Dental Hygienists Promote Oral Health for Older Adults

September 29, 2014 (Ottawa, ON) – On October 1, Canadians will honour and celebrate the older adults whose mentoring, leadership, and volunteerism have shaped the nation. National Seniors Day is also a perfect opportunity for dental hygienists to remind this vital segment of our population of the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene habits.

“Thanks to healthier lifestyles and advances in oral and medical care, Canadians are now keeping most of their natural teeth,” notes Mary Bertone, president of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA). “Older adults have unique oral hygiene needs that must not be ignored.” For example, seniors tend to develop more cavities on the roots of their teeth than younger adults. In addition, many medications can cause dry mouth, a condition that can contribute to cavities and other oral health problems, and unchecked plaque can result in gingivitis, tooth decay, and periodontal disease, which is now recognized as a risk factor for diabetes, stroke, and lung and heart diseases. As a result, all older adults should be encouraged to brush natural teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean in between the teeth at least once a day. Dentures (full or partial) should be brushed and soaked daily and the gums should be brushed and massaged, either with a soft toothbrush or with a warm, damp cloth.

Equally important are regular visits to a dental hygienist, whether seniors are living on their own or in a long-term care residence. “Dental hygienists have the skills, knowledge, and judgement to detect oral issues early on, and they can help to develop a daily oral care plan that will ensure optimal oral health at any age,” Bertone explains. In fact, good oral hygiene can help to prevent more serious illnesses and allow our seniors to continue contributing to our communities for years to come.

Serving the profession since 1963, CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 26,800 registered dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing more than 17,000 individual members including dental hygienists and students. Dental hygiene is the sixth largest registered health profession in Canada with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit: www.dentalhygienecanada.ca.

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