Hello, my name is Heather Cooper and I am absolutely thrilled and honored to have been chosen as the 2009 DENTAL HYGIENIST HERO™ from the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), in partnership with Johnson & Johnson Inc. (JJI), makers of LISTERINE® Antiseptic Mouthwash. I would like to take this opportunity to summarize my journey as a dental hygienist and give encouragement and hopefully some inspiration to other dental hygienists that want to get involved in their community and give back. I would encourage you to visit our website www.harbourcitydental.com for more information about what we do or to contact us if you have any other questions.

I am a registered dental hygienist and I own and operate Harbour City Dental Hygiene Group Inc., the first and only private dental hygiene clinic in Nanaimo, BC. We specialize in providing comprehensive and comfortable dental hygiene treatment to the entire family in an extremely relaxed atmosphere with aromatherapy, pillows and blankets followed by a hot towel after treatment. There is no restorative dental work completed at our clinic, therefore, we eliminate many of the sounds and smells associated with dental offices which is appealing to many people with dental anxiety and phobias and we are completely mercury and latex free for those who may be chemically sensitive.

We now have over 2500 loyal clients and our client base grows every day but we realized that not everyone can access our services here in the office. We recognized that there is a huge need for preventive dental hygiene services among our senior community who are less mobile and unable to easily attend a regular dental hygiene clinic. In March, 2009, we launched a residential care program and are now providing mobile dental hygiene services at senior’s care facilities and for home bound clients. On a weekly basis we pack up our mobile dental equipment and travel out in the community to ensure Nanaimo’s aging population has much needed dental hygiene care. We have also coordinated the services of a few local dentists to come to the facility for a dental examination and then followed up by making arrangements for any restorative work needed. We hope to expand this service to include other groups in the community that may have difficulty accessing a regular dental office. The possibilities are endless!

My journey with private dental hygiene practice started over 6 years ago. Before that I worked in private dental practices in Nanaimo, Victoria and for a year in Australia. I have been fortunate to live in such a wonderfully supportive community that has allowed Harbour City Dental Hygiene to grow and flourish. It really is my time to give back and I made a commitment to myself to nurture community projects that continue to educate and improve the oral health of residents in and around Nanaimo. Over the years I have given several talks to local community groups like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Diabetes Association, Osteoporosis Society, Girl Guides and Sparks and several others about oral health and how it does effects our entire body. However, I am most proud of a community project I started in February, 2009 called Smiles for Life – Compassionate Prenatal Dental Care. I would be thrilled if my experiences could motivate other dental hygienists in the community, across the province or even across Canada to become involved in this program.

At Harbour City Dental Hygiene we offer Smiles For Life, a compassionate prenatal dental care program for qualified participants. Each month, expectant mothers who are in need of financial
assistance but do not have access to dental insurance benefits or ministry benefits and become accepted into the program receive free dental hygiene treatment necessary to achieve optimal oral health.

Did you know…… that gum disease has been linked to pre-term, low birth weight (PTLBW) deliveries? Women with periodontal disease are seven times more likely to deliver a PTLBW baby than those with healthy gums. It has been shown that PTLBW accounts for about 80% of all infant deaths that occur around the time of birth and may cause long-term disabilities. Dental hygiene services for individuals with periodontal disease (which includes gingivitis) may reduce the risk of PTLBW by 50%.

The Smiles For Life participant receives dental hygiene services free of charge for the duration of their current pregnancy. This program is aimed at helping mothers deliver healthier babies and gives us access to pregnant mothers in order to help educate them about oral health care for their new born child. We will continue to run this program throughout the year, year after year.

In addition to my community participation, over 6 years ago I was an integral part of the development of our local dental hygiene study club and served on the board for 5 years. Our community did not have a local forum for dental hygienists to get together regularly and I feel it is so important for dental hygienists to connect with their peers not only to gain knowledge but to band together and support each other and our initiatives as a profession. I will continue to fully support the study group as an active member and encourage everyone else to do the same.

Nanaimo has had a dental assisting program at our local college for many years but a few years ago they added a dental hygiene program and the college earned university status and is now Vancouver Island University. I was asked by one of the faculty members to be a part of the dental hygiene student education on different career options. Of course I accepted and now mentor the dental hygiene students in our community as an introduction to private dental hygiene practice. Years ago I had spoken on a couple of occasions to the dental hygiene students at Camosun College in Victoria about my experiences working as a dental hygienist abroad in Australia. I found it so rewarding as the excitement and energy of a new class of graduates full of enthusiasm and vigour about their new profession infected me – in turn it gets me excited all over again, what a great profession to grow with and be a part of!

Thank you for your time and KEEP YOUR SMILE AWHILE – See a Registered Dental Hygienist!

Sincerely,

Heather Cooper, RDH