



September 28, 2016

Chairman Peter Gillett
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Dear Chairman Gillett:

The New Jersey Dental Hygienists' Association (NJDHA) is contacting you regarding the future of the Rutgers University School of Health Professions Department of Allied Dental Education, which includes the Rutgers Dental Hygiene Program. The Program recently transitioned from an associate degree program to a baccalaureate degree program; the transition was approved at all University levels as well as by all accrediting bodies. The first class for the baccalaureate was to enter in January of 2017. Unfortunately, those students now have received letters from the administration that the program was not accepting applicants.

This is a critical concern for the profession due to critical access to oral care issues, educational issues, and professional issues. I urge your assistance in resolving this issue so that the Program can continue.

Crisis in Access to Oral Care

NJDHA, as part of the New Jersey Oral Health Care Coalition, addresses the access to oral care crisis in New Jersey along with other public, private, educational, and non-profit entities in New Jersey. Indeed, New Jersey has significant access issues leading to complications in general health, school attendance, employment issues, and other significant problems related to lack of oral care. This issue has been reviewed by a variety of reports over the last five years, such as:

- A State of Decay, Volume III by Oral Health America, 2016

- In Search of Dental Care by PEW Trusts, June 2013
- The Role of Dental Hygienists in Providing Access to Oral Health Care by the National Governors Association, 2014.

One solution to this crisis has been the Rutgers Dental Hygiene Program, which provides preventive care to communities of need in New Jersey. The Program has a large patient pool. These patients rely on the Program for routine care, which can prevent many dental problems, and for coordination of dental care through faculty practices. Many of these patients have fixed incomes, no insurance to access other care, and time demands that can be met by the variety of clinic hours offered by the Program. Indeed, the most vulnerable populations, including senior citizens, Head Start classes, school children, and the working poor, benefit from the Program's care.

Educational Issues

Dental hygiene programs across the nation are required by Commission on Dental Accreditation Standards to employ educators who hold a degree beyond the degree being taught. That identifies the need for educators holding baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees. Recruitment of qualified faculty is currently a problem, with the problem expected to grow as existing educators retire.

If the Program does not continue, the only program providing advanced dental hygiene degrees in New Jersey will be gone. This is a significant disadvantage as recruitment of educators for existing New Jersey programs will have to seek candidates from out of state. This is a considerable disadvantage for New Jersey employees.

Professional Issues

New Jersey dental hygienists are required by state statute and/or regulations to be certified for certain aspects of their practice, including monitoring of nitrous oxide anesthesia, administration of local anesthesia, and completion of refresher courses for licensure reactivation. The Program provides the only state-wide, continuously offered courses needed by the profession. Without these courses, there will be a significant complication for dental hygienist employment and for meeting the needs for care in New Jersey.

NJDHA understands that the Program's clinic is actually owned by Union County College and that discussion about the future of the Program has stopped. Students are



not being accepted for January 2017. The entire profession is alarmed about this development.

I urge you to investigate this issue and to take action to make sure this valuable resource for New Jersey citizens is not lost. It is critical that the Dental Hygiene Program continues. Please take action to ensure classes are again accepted into the Program. If I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your assistance in resolving this issue.

Sincerely,

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