

# Alice M. Horowitz, Ph.D., Oral Health Change Agent: An Unsung Hero

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We are all familiar with the Oral Cancer Prevention, Dental Sealants, School-Based Fluoride, Oral Health Education and Promotion, Health Literacy, NIH Caries Consensus Conference, and Healthy People 2000 and 2010 prevention initiatives and programs. However, we may not be familiar with the person who has consistently been most influential in bringing these and other issues to the attention of the dental community and the American people. Although many individuals, organizations, agencies, and institutions have been involved in the prevention of oral diseases in our country, if you look closely (and you have to look very closely), one person consistently stands out. Without a closer look, you would not realize that she has been the force, the passion, and the worker behind these initiatives.

Alice M. Horowitz, R.D.H., M.A., Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Division of Population and Health Promotion Sciences at the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), has been a highly dedicated, determined, committed, and conscientious behind-the-scenes national and international stimulus and resource for better oral health and overall health.

Although Dr. Horowitz will insist that she is just one of many individuals involved in promoting oral health, her imprint is consistently seen on many oral disease prevention initiatives that have been promoted in our country for the past twenty-five years. Some recent examples:

- The renewed interest in oral cancer prevention was stimulated by Dr. Horowitz and her colleagues, who

played a critical role in building a strategic national plan for oral cancer prevention and then led the way to generate action. Her most recent contribution of many is documented in the November 2001 *JADA* Special Supplement—Combating Oral Cancer.<sup>1</sup>

- Together with a team of agency representatives, Dr. Horowitz and colleagues aptly led the development and promotion of the National Oral Health Objectives in Healthy People 2010.<sup>2</sup>

- Dr. Horowitz was the Planning Committee Chairperson of the 2001 NIH Consensus Conference on the Management and Diagnosis of Dental Caries, and she led the team of reviewers through evidence-based review methodology training, creating the first such approach for the NIH consensus conference process.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Horowitz has focused on oral health promotion and disease prevention her entire career. She is well known and recognized in the dental public health and dental research communities, having been awarded the John W. Knutson Distinguished Service Award by the Oral Health Section of the American Public Health Association in 2000, the Distinguished Service Award of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry in 1999, and the Trendley Dean Award from the International Association of Dental Research in 1992.

Dr. Horowitz received her R.D.H., B.A., and M.A. (Education) from the University of Iowa in the early 1960s and her Ph.D. in health education in 1992 from the University of Maryland—a real lifelong learner. She began her oral health career as a dental hygienist in private practice, then taught at the Uni-



versity of Iowa in the early 1960s for four years before working as an education specialist for the federal government at the Dental Health Center in San Francisco in 1966 after getting her master's degree. She continued in this role for the Health Resources Administration until 1976 when she joined the National Caries Program at the then-National Institute of Dental Research (NIDR). Her primary responsibilities with NIDR, and now the NIDCR, are in disease prevention, health education and promotion, and science transfer.

Some of her many achievements during that time period include:

- the conduct of controlled clinical studies on dental plaque removal in school settings;
- the conduct of research on appropriate use and adoption of fluorides and sealants;
- the development of caries prevention guides for schools and public health programs;
- the organization, planning, and dissemination of the 1984 NIH Dental Sealants Consensus Conference, where she served as the Planning Committee Chair, as she did for many subsequent conferences and symposia nationally and internationally;

- stimulation and incorporation of the importance of health education, health promotion, and health literacy for the dental profession;
- the pursuit of a more accurate definition and understanding of early childhood caries; and
- the development and evaluation of the Healthy People 2000 National Oral Health Objectives.

With more than seventy peer-reviewed articles in national and international journals, eleven book chapters, ten monographs, and numerous book reviews, editorials, and letters to the editor, Dr. Horowitz has helped everyone appreciate the importance of prevention. She also played a key role in the first Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health and the U.S. Task Force for Community Preventive Services. She has mentored many graduate students and dentists, especially those from China, Korea, Pakistan, Thailand, and Japan, where she is revered by the dental community.

Dr. Horowitz has held a number of national leadership positions, including President of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry in 1992, the first hygienist in that position, Chair of both the Intersectional Council and Oral Health Section of the American Public Health Association, and

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**Table 1. Healthy People 2010: oral health goal and national objectives**

**Goal:** Prevent and control oral and craniofacial diseases, conditions, and injuries and improve access to related services

**Objectives from the Oral Health Chapter:**

1. Reduce the proportion of children and adolescents who have dental caries experience in their primary or permanent teeth.
2. Reduce the proportion of children, adolescents, and adults with untreated dental decay.
3. Increase the proportion of adults who have never had a permanent tooth extracted because of dental caries or periodontal disease.
4. Reduce the proportion of older adults who have had all their natural teeth extracted.
5. Reduce periodontal disease.
6. Increase the proportion of oral and pharyngeal cancers detected at the earliest stage.
7. Increase the proportion of adults who, in the past 12 months, report having had an examination to detect oral and pharyngeal cancers.
8. Increase the proportion of children who have received dental sealants on their molar teeth.
9. Increase the proportion of the U.S. population served by community water systems with optimally fluoridated water.
10. Increase the proportion of children and adults who use the oral health care system each year.
11. Increase the proportion of long-term care residents who use the oral health care system each year.
12. Increase the proportion of low-income children and adolescents who received any preventive dental service during the past year.
13. (Developmental) Increase the proportion of school-based health centers with an oral health component.
14. Increase the proportion of local health departments and community-based health centers, including community, migrant, and homeless health centers, that have an oral health component.
15. Increase the number of states and the District of Columbia that have a system for recording and referring infants and children with cleft lips, cleft palates, and other craniofacial anomalies to craniofacial anomaly rehabilitative teams.
16. Increase the number of states and the District of Columbia that have an oral and craniofacial health surveillance system.
17. (Developmental) Increase the number of tribal, state (including the District of Columbia), and local health agencies that serve jurisdictions of 250,000 or more persons that have in place an effective public dental health program directed by a dental professional with public health training.

**Objectives from Other Chapters:**

- In the health professions, allied and associated health profession fields, and the nursing field, increase the proportion of all degrees awarded to members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.
  - Reduce the oropharyngeal cancer death rate.
  - Increase the proportion of persons with diabetes who have at least an annual dental examination.
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Chair of the Science Transfer Committee of the International Association of Dental Research, to name a few. She has given many presentations in the United States and around the world and has also served as a consultant to many organizations including the American Dental Association, the Pan American Health Organization, and the World Health Organization.

It is not easy to capture Dr. Horowitz's boundless energy and commitment to oral disease prevention with the written word, but the following characteristics probably describe her best:

- a national and international stimulus and catalyst for better oral health
- a perpetual oral health educator and promoter
- a tireless leader and advocate
- scientifically based, but yet pragmatic
- compassionate, dedicated, and inspirational
- never afraid to ask the tough questions
- never afraid to speak up for what's right
- a voice for those who are vulnerable and voiceless
- a true leader, yet very modest and humble<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Alice Horowitz is an ideal role model for our dental, dental hygiene, and dental assisting students, one to which they all should be exposed. Her passion and strategies for promoting health and preventing oral diseases need to be transmitted to every new cohort of developing oral health professionals. She is another extraordinary government worker, like the firefighters, police, and emergency personnel who responded to the September 11, 2001, World

Trade Center tragedy. They and she give every ounce of their mind, body, and soul to respond to a severe unmet public need.

The oral disease epidemic in our country has been well documented: there is much to be done.<sup>5</sup> We need every dental, dental hygiene, and dental assisting school, faculty, staff, and student to be familiar with and work towards the Healthy People 2010 National Oral Health Objectives, so we can have a healthier America (see Table 1). Dr. Horowitz has shown us how to do that deliberately, quietly, and effectively. Now, it is up to us.

Thank you, Alice Horowitz, for showing us the way and for all you have done for better oral health.

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## REFERENCES

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