

Janie Scales Skinner, RDH, BASDH

Janie Scales Skinner, RDH, BASDH, started out in oral health care early in life. “My father was a general dentist, with a practice for over 42 years in St. Augustine, Florida,” she said. “I worked after school and all summers in the office. Through the years, my duties ranged from dental assistant to office manager.”

Skinner received her Associate of Science Dental Hygiene degree from Florida College at Jacksonville in 1993 and her Bachelor of Applied Science in Dental Hygiene (BASDH) from St. Petersburg College in 2017. Advancing her education created an important change in her career.

“Don’t fall victim to what I call the ‘CCC’ Syndrome — Clinically Complacent and Comfortable,” she said. “I did this for many years and actually had become numb to recognize the need for change.”

“I showed up to work every day, I followed the office routine daily. It was when I continued my education at St. Petersburg College for the BASDH program that I revived my love of the dental hygiene profession and felt empowered by the instructors and fellow colleagues.”

Skinner enjoys educating people about their oral health and its impact on their overall health. “I loved the family type practice that I had grown up in, and I loved helping people. That’s why I chose the dental hygiene profession in the first place.”



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Three days a week, Skinner works in private practice as a clinician. She also spends two or three days a week traveling to ICF/MR facilities (long-term care facilities for the developmentally disabled) throughout Florida. There, she provides oral health screening and preventive care to residents. She also educates the direct care staff responsible for daily patient care to include oral hygiene services as part of the routine.

"My father, Dr. Waldo Scales, inspired me to do this sort of service," Skinner said. "He spent a large portion of his time trying to increase the access to dental services to those with developmental disabilities. The Florida Dental Health Foundation gave him the Humanitarian Award for his achievements and dedication to the special needs individual.

"He truly enjoyed helping those who didn't have the ability to help themselves. Working by his side, both as an assistant and dental hygienist, I became as passionate as my father towards helping those with special needs."

Skinner emphasized how important oral health care is for people with special needs. "It is imperative, she said. "Many of my patients with special needs are medically compromised and are at a much higher risk for sepsis and aspiration pneumonia. The majority rely on others for oral care as well as all of their daily needs.

"This is why I do my best to educate as many of the direct care staff as I can on the importance of oral care and its implications on overall health and well-being."

Following her father's death, Skinner sought a dentist who would be willing to carry on service to this population of patients with special needs.

"At the time, there were over 56 facilities left without a dental provider," she said. "I found a willing dentist who didn't mind fitting travel into her busy schedule or mind being 'shown the ropes' when working with patients with developmentally disabilities. When she agreed to take on 14 of those 56 facilities, I knew I had found a new dental home. I have been a clinical dental hygienist at this same office for 16 years."

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Given her commitment to a vulnerable population, it's not surprising that Skinner also helps out her community.

"I had the honor of being invited to be a member of the Special Needs Access Group (SNAG)," she said. The goal of SNAG, founded by Tim Garvey, DMD, is to increase access to dental care by people with special needs.

"Presently, SNAG's goal is to have multiple available clinical sites in the Jacksonville area," Skinner explained. "This will help alleviate the scheduling burden that currently is being experienced by the clinic Dr. Garvey directs. Patient scheduling is presently 18 months out.

"Being part of SNAG is a perfect example of what can be accomplished when health care professionals work collaboratively to solve access to care issues," Skinner added. "If you have a passion to help in your community, do it! Don't be intimidated by those who tell you that you alone can't make a difference."

Skinner said that she is currently considering pursuing a Master of Public Health degree at the University of South Florida. She advises others to consider more education, as well. "It opens doors of opportunities you might not know exist," she said. "If you have a passion, find a way to meld it with your profession. Don't fall victim to the 'CCC Syndrome.'"

Skinner, who is presently an alternate delegate for ADHA and the Florida Dental Hygienists' Association, encourages all dental hygienists to be active at the component level. "Attending my first ADHA Annual Conference last year in Jacksonville provided me a wealth of networking opportunities," she said. "It was an outstanding opportunity to meet others in the dental hygiene profession who look outside the typical boundaries and are making a difference. These differences are not only beneficial for our profession, but also for the community at large.

"Although networking is one of many membership benefits of ADHA/FDHA, the empowerment and camaraderie experienced at the local component level are rewarding as well." ■