

February 15, 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Marie Paulis and I am a registered dental hygienist employed as a clinical educator at the Fones School of Dental Hygiene at the University of Bridgeport. Our clinic, as well as being an educational facility, serves to meet some of the preventive oral health care needs of the community. We are equipped with 30 dental units and are able to perform dental prophylaxis (cleaning), take radiographs, give fluoride treatments, place sealants on teeth and provide other preventive services.

We have many patients who would be considered part of the "underserved" population...patients from all ethnic backgrounds who present with no insurance, lots of dental decay, and nowhere to turn. We refer these patients to local clinics, where they are sometimes seen but sometimes are told they have to wait months for an appointment, despite being in daily pain. It is a sad and painful dilemma we are in with the lack of access to dental care. According to an article written in BioMed Central Oral Health Journal in 2006, "The consistent relationship between vulnerable groups of children and prevalence of caries suggests that there are complex system-level factors that work against families in obtaining caries prevention and quality and timely oral health care."

If you search the Internet with the terms "shortage of dentists," you are presented with a long list of sites and articles from many states. According to an article published in the Journal of Dental Education in November 2007, over the next 10 years, twice as many dentists will be retiring than will be entering dental school. Additionally, practicing dentists trying to operate a business are more likely to set up their dental practice in an affluent, well-populated neighborhood, as opposed to an area where dental care is needed but not easily afforded.

As dental hygienists, we are preventive oral disease specialists. We already have the skills necessary to reach out to public health populations and educate them about the importance of dental care and give them preventive treatment. However, then we are withdrawn from the equation and wait and hope that they will find access to the restorative care they need. Many of our patients ask why we are not able to do some of their basic restorative treatment in our dental hygiene facility. We would like to be able to meet more of our special needs population with no other access to care options.

It is my personal opinion that the advanced dental hygiene Master's degree position will not detract from dentistry but would add a vital component to our profession, just as nurse practitioners have to the medical field. I have seen nurse practitioner's for both my care and that of my children and have always been nothing but appreciative of the nurse practitioner's skills.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. I may be reached for further discussion at Cell: (203) 260-0668 or by email: [mpaulis@bridgeport.edu](mailto:mpaulis@bridgeport.edu).

Sincerely,  
Marie Paulis, RDH,BS  
Fones School of Dental Hygiene  
60 Lafayette St  
Bridgeport, CT. 06604

Home address:  
22 Parkway Terrace  
Milford, CT 06461-1929  
(203) 874-7179