



*News & Information about Oral Health*

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**For Immediate Release**

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**ADHA Emphasizes Access to Care Issues after Recent Tragedy**

**Chicago—March 1, 2007**—The Washington Post, on Wednesday, February 28, 2007, reported that a twelve-year-old boy in the Washington D.C. area, Deamonte Driver, had died of complications resulting from an untreated dental abscess, after bacteria from the untreated tooth had spread to his brain. Deamonte had undergone two brain surgeries and more than six weeks of hospital care. This story highlights what the Surgeon General called in 2000, a “silent epidemic” of dental disease that affects our most vulnerable citizens—poor children, the elderly, and many members of racial and ethnic minority groups.

In the greater Washington D.C. area, patients currently do not have direct access to dental hygienists because of restrictive public health policies. In many other states patients are allowed direct access to dental hygienists for preventive procedures, which has been an effective model in increasing access to care.

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), along with many other oral health care organizations, has made finding a solution to expanding access to care a top priority in recent years. In 2004 ADHA created the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP), after a near-unanimous vote at its 81<sup>st</sup> annual session, as a practice model designed to have greater reach and impact upon the underserved populations in the U.S. By lowering restrictive barriers currently obstructing direct preventive care to the public and increasing basic restorative services, the ADHP will allow dental hygienists to be a more effective piece of the entire dental team.

“This is a sad, sad story,” says Margaret Lappan Green, RDH, MS, ADHA president. “Access to care is at crisis level in this country, and Deamonte’s death emphasizes that even more. Hopefully the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner will significantly improve the level of access to care in this country, but until its completion, and even beyond, the dental community must look for new and creative ways to reach these underserved populations and maximize the potential of current technologies, such as teledentistry, that are already in place.”

Dental hygienists are prevention specialists who are uniquely qualified and positioned to meet the oral health needs of the underserved. Dental hygienists can detect signs and symptoms of many life-threatening diseases, educate patients to develop oral health care treatment plans, and serve as an invaluable pipeline for referring those who need the care of a dentist.

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ADHA is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of more than 120,000 dental hygienists across the country. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. For more information about ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit ADHA at <http://www.adha.org>.

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*Professionals promoting total health through quality oral health care.*

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