



Work Doesn't Have to Be Painful

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As a reader, you may wonder how I came to this place in your professional journal as a guest editor. As a practicing physical therapist with more than 20 years of experience, I became actively interested in the practice of dentistry while working with a dental hygienist who had undergone her second bilateral carpal tunnel surgery. She came to my clinic for rehabilitation, expressing grave reservations about returning to work in general and as a hygienist in particular. As I began to evaluate her and the specifics of her job, I wondered why she performed some of her work tasks in the manner she described and observed others that may have caused some of her problems. That particular interaction more than 16 years ago started my journey. As a physical therapist, we are trained to evaluate musculoskeletal problems, determine the causative factors, and recommend solutions. These solutions may consist of modalities to alleviate pain, exercise to stretch or strengthen tissues, education to promote independence, and develop injury prevention strategies and job modifications to protect the patient upon their return to work. In short, we are detectives looking for clues to solve problems. Since that encounter in 1989, I have been personally challenged to find a solution to this “problem” and have since met many other dental professionals with similar and numerous other

complaints. The list runs the gamut from headaches to back pain, numbness, tingling, and weakness. The bottom line is that many dental professionals accept pain as part of their daily routine.

While much is known about posture, musculoskeletal pain and injury in the medical literature, I have found little scientific discussion in the dental literature that evaluates these issues and makes recommendations for solutions. In traveling and consulting with dental professionals, I find that many have accepted pain as part of their daily routine. Many are not certain how they got it, and fewer are aware of how to alleviate it. I find this troubling as someone who is passionate about my work. It is disheartening to think a career we could be so passionate about may be harmful to us. Having been inspired by all of these circumstances and not having come up with an absolute solution in all cases, I have attempted to identify several reasonable solutions for one particular type of complaint in this publication, namely back/neck pain. And so my journey continues.

In this edition, Dr. Jones and I have attempted to provide the readers with insight into the lives of relatively healthy dental professionals while describing some of the common maladies associated with those suffering with back and neck problems. In addition, this issue introduces two specific strategies that may extend the productivity and career longevity of the practitioner. My hope is

to provide a basis from which to achieve an improved level of health and fitness while alleviating pain from your daily practice. As guest editor of this edition of the *Journal of the California Dental Association*, I have been invited to bring to the dentists of California information regarding posture and pain. This information comes from the domains of physical therapy, rehabilitation, engineering, and ergonomics. To accomplish this, I have asked distinguished individuals, well known in their areas of expertise, to contribute to the issues that uniquely affect the community of dental healthcare workers. Our hope is to provide an outstanding regular exercise routine to healthy dental professionals while providing injury prevention strategies for relief of back and neck pain in practitioners who work with pain day in and day out. In addition, we hope to lay the foundation for future research in this area. Our authors will shed some light on the effects of career training on dental and hygiene, along with some of the habits that seem to be acquired along the way which may create certain musculoskeletal problems. Dr. Jones and I have



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had a “meeting of the minds” in recommending preventive strategies for individuals with and without persistent pain and feel that this issue of the *Journal* will be a resource for both. Thank you for your interest.

Dr. Richard Marklin is a researcher and ergonomist in the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering at Marquette University in Milwaukee. His article presents the results of a study to measure the seated working postures of dentists and dental hygienists. Given the significant amount of time spent by the dental professional in a seated position, I felt that Dr. Marklin’s findings would shed some light on potential risks for musculoskeletal disorders and pain commonly found in the dental operatory.

Dr. Robert Werner is a physician, epidemiologist, and chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center and professor at the University of Michigan. He has done extensive work with the American Dental Association over the years to quantify the incidence and prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders in dental professionals attending the national meetings. His article establishes a “baseline” for the musculoskeletal status among dental and dental hygiene students as they begin their careers as dental healthcare workers. The baseline data will be the basis for a longitudinal study of musculoskeletal pain among dental professionals over the course their careers.

David Pleva, PT, MA, Dip. MDT, is a practicing physical therapist. He is a diplomate of the McKenzie Institute USA and a practitioner in private practice. Dave has worked extensively with individuals experiencing back and neck pain. As a faculty member of the McKenzie Institute USA, he trains physical therapists, physicians and chiropractors across the country in the McKenzie approach to treatment of spinal disorders. **CDA**