Saying thanks to dental assistants

By Kelly Soderlund, ADA News Staff

It's that time of year to thank the assistants who help your practice succeed.

Dental offices throughout the world will celebrate Dental Assistants Recognition Week March 4–10. The theme for this year's event is "Key to Productivity: The Professional Dental Assistant."

Each year, dentists take a week to honor dental assistants for their role on the dental team, recognizing their broad spectrum of duties and highlighting their often unheralded contribution to quality dental care. The American Dental Assistants Association, American Dental Association, Canadian Dental Assistants Association and Canadian Dental Association jointly recognize the observance. Dental assistant associations, dental assisting schools, and U.S. Army and Air Force dental clinics all join dental offices in honoring dental assistants during this designated week.

"Dental assistants are valued members of the dental team. The role of assistants has become even more important in recent years with the advent of expanded functions," said Dr. Mark Zust, chair of the ADA Council on Dental Practice. "More than ever, assistants achieve professional growth by studying and receiving advanced training. Dentists delegate more procedures and assistants take pride in their accomplishments."

Dental assistants will celebrate their contributions to the profession by participating in educational and charity events and other team activities. Dentists typically show their respect for dental assistants' diverse contributions to the dental profession and the public by providing perks such as luncheons, flowers or treats.

"Dental assistants show their value by providing everything from supportive procedures to direct patient care through expanded functions, which boosts productivity. The assistant provides a valuable connection with the patient; it is often the assistant that the patient turns to when they have questions, the assistant who explains the finances and the assistant who keeps the patient calm during treatment," said Claudia Pohl, president of the American Dental Assistants Association.

Each year, the ADA urges dental assistants and offices to describe their activities and successes throughout the week and submit them for publication in The Dental Assistant, the ADAA journal.

To obtain article entry forms and ready-to-use ad slicks for your state publications and promotional kits, email dentalpractice@ada.org or visit the Dental Practice Management page at ADA.org. Go to
Professional Resources and click on Oral Health Topics to get there. A downloadable anniversary certificate that can be personalized, printed and framed for display is also available on this page. A complete list of personalized products is available at [www.adacatalog.org](http://www.adacatalog.org).

ADA CE Online offers courses for dental assistants and special pricing for dental team members. For more information, visit [www.adaceonline.org](http://www.adaceonline.org).

**From Indian Health Service:**

On Behalf of the Indian Health Service Division of Oral Health, I want to thank our dental assistants for their contributions to improving the oral health and overall health of American Indian and Alaska Natives. During National Dental Assistants Recognition Week, I encourage all of us to recognize the hard working dental assistants who help make our programs so successful.

The week of March 4-10, 2012 is National Dental Assistants Recognition Week. The week was established by the American Dental Association and the American Dental Assistants Association in 1976 to acknowledge the skills and contributions of dental assistants.

For the Indian Health Service (IHS), this means giving much deserved recognition to the more than 1,000 IHS, Tribal and Urban Dental Assistants for providing clinical services and sustaining high-quality oral health promotion and disease prevention activities in the clinic and the community. During FY 2010 the dental program provided an average of 3,104,100 dental services – an incredible 59,700 dental services weekly. Impressively, this was an increase of over 95,000 dental services from the previous fiscal year. Clearly, these services could not have been provided without the support of dental assistants working chairside.

Dental assistants are involved in the development and implementation of numerous continuing dental education programs for dental staff. They participate and lead in oral health promotion/disease prevention activities that support the mission to improve the health of American Indian/Alaska Native people. They recruit and mentor new dental assistants, and serve as ambassadors between oral health providers and local community members. Dental assistants are valued members of the dental team.

IHS Division of Oral Health recognizes the IHS, Tribal and Urban dental assistants as professionals. Their ability to help extend the range of dental services that can be provided and the number of people who can be treated is critical to making advances in eliminating oral health disparities.

The contributions of the IHS, Tribal and Urban Dental Assistants have helped to increase the quality of life for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Again, I'd like to thank our dental assistants for their contributions to the IHS Division of Oral Health.