

BEYOND THE DRILL: THE INCREASING INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN DENTISTRY



Up until the 1970s, dentistry was traditionally a profession dominated by men. It's hard to believe, but just 50 years ago, the idea of a female dentist was quite rare. In fact, in 1962 the Canadian census showed that the profession was still very male dominated with 5,772 men and 96 women licensed to practice. I often like to ponder at how far we have come when I observe older yearbook photos in clients offices.

Dr. Caroline Louise Josephine Wells, the first female dentist licensed in Ontario, completed her LDS in 1893 while juggling a houseful of young children and a dying husband. Six years later, with more children and a busy practice, she earned her DDS. Dr. Wells had a distinguished 36-year career in Ontario and was the first dentist in Canada to entirely confine a practice to hospital dentistry.

Fast forward to today, many female dentists continue to struggle with work life and balance. Wearing the hat of a dentist, owner, mother, and spouse takes a lot of



work. Dr. Wells' story continues to resonate. Entry into today's dental schools and practices is increasingly equal, gender wise. Yet, barriers still exist for women in dentistry — and new factors in the profession pile on more challenges. While dentistry is a welcoming and fulfilling career for women, men still hold many of the power positions in the profession. True equality is getting closer, but we're not there yet. Parity is expected by 2035.

Fortunately, we are seeing positive effects as women are taking their place in leadership roles - Dr. Lisa Bentley, current ODA President, Dr. Deborah Stymiest became the first woman to lead the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) in 2008 as President, and today the President is Dr. Janet Lynn Tomkins just to name a few.

Friday April 14th – I was fortunate enough to attend and contribute to the Women in Dentistry Symposium, led by the enigmatic Dr. Effie Habsha which continued in barrier breaking style. The goal of this symposium was to provide an update on current concepts in dentistry, network with other female dental professionals and exchange success stories. Mission accomplished! Like a breath of fresh air, the day was exciting. The speakers excelled and delivered exceptional information while attendees were super enthusiastic and thoroughly enjoyed the day. It is amazing to think this whole thing started as a way for Dr. Habsha to thank her referring doctors. To grow to this level demonstrates the clear need for more of these opportunities. The pursuit for work-life balance is important and necessary and of course, never ending.

As much as the profession allows a female dentist to be a business owner and a doctor, as well as do what they love and work with all kinds of people, the continued stress of managing HR, and of course a family continues to rise. Female dentists today may not face the same hurdles of previous generations, but new and complex hurdles continue to crop up everyday. Fortunately, women continue to support other women and that was clear at WID Symposium!

The next event coming soon will be May 19th in Ottawa presented by The Ottawa Women's Dental Study Club. Dr. Fern White will be the guest speaker addressing the topic of ***How to Stop Dental Stress and Make More...*** For more information or to register, simply go to owdscfernwhite.eventbrite.ca.

As we continue to see the positive shift in the roles women play in dentistry, we will also see their impact on how dentistry is practiced. After all, it is known that female dentists tend to spend more time discussing treatment options with their patients. Let us encourage each other to be strong and wise. Let us be bold and dream big and not only embrace ourselves but each other too!

Written by:



Jackie Joachim,
CEO & Sales
Representative



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