

ISU has strong dental hygiene department

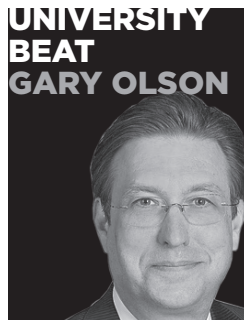
Idaho State University plays the lead role in health care education in the state, from family medicine, to nursing, to pharmacy, and dental hygiene. Over 35 percent of the degrees that ISU awarded last year were in health-related fields. At the Department of Dental Hygiene, for example, faculty and students are acquiring skills, conducting research, and aiding the community at the same time.

Over the years, the dental hygiene department has earned a reputation for graduating highly skilled professionals. In fact, an astounding 100 percent of 2009 graduates passed the rigorous Dental Hygiene National Board Examination, ranking the department among the top 10 percent in the nation.

Every 2009 graduate also passed the regional clinical examinations, and written and clinical local anesthesia examinations on the first attempt. The results of this high-quality education are high levels of job placement and happy employers, as evidenced by recent surveys of employers and alumni.

The department also operates a dental hygiene clinic on campus, where members of the community can receive low-cost, high-quality oral health care.

For ISU's dental hygiene students, then, school is more than classroom instruction and clinical practice. Last year, faculty and students offered oral health education and services to 2,500 people in the community at health fairs, educational sessions, and the Special Olympics



Special Smiles program at the International Special Olympics Winter Games in Boise.

The department's faculty are quite active in research as well as educational activities. Recently, Department Chair Kathleen Hodges received a \$329,760 federal grant to create the ISU Idaho Oral Health

Institute. The Institute's focus is on research, student education, and continuing education for health care workers.

These federal funds will be used to purchase distance-learning education equipment that will link five ISU oral clinics in Pocatello, Meridian, and Idaho Falls to deliver the latest information to practitioners throughout the state and beyond.

Professor Hodges and her colleagues are creating knowledge that is making a difference on a national and even international level.

Professor Tara Johnson, for example, conducts collaborative research with Dr. Alok Bhushan in ISU's Biomedical Research Institute, focusing on early intervention and prevention of oral cancer. She has presented her research at national and international meetings of the American Cancer Association and the National Center for Dental Hygiene Research.

Professor Linda Boyd recently published results of a national survey about diabetes knowledge and practices. The study identified a need for more education about diabetes as it applies to clinical patient care. She has worked with a number of national organizations to develop clinical practice guidelines for treating patients with diabetes and, in

conjunction with a graduate student at the ISU-Meridian Health Science Center, is studying the effects of treatment in diabetic patients with gum disease. She was recently named a Health Care Hero by the Idaho Business Review.

Professor Denise Bowen and clinical instructor Brooke Agado are studying the effects of gum disease treatment on the occurrence of illness and on the quality of life in patients with bronchitis and emphysema. Through their research, they hope to reduce the risk of illnesses such as pneumonia in patients with lung disease and elderly patients in long-term care centers. The researchers are collaborating with ISU's Family Practice Residency, Portneuf Medical Center's Heart and Vascular Center, and the Pocatello Lung and Sleep Disorders Clinic.

Their colleague, professor Kandis Garland, is currently conducting a national survey of dental hygienists to determine knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of health care workers in relation to the infection control practices recommended by the Centers for Disease Control. She chairs a working group of the national Organization for Safety and Asepsis Procedures, dedicated to promoting infection control and safety policies.

Clearly, at ISU's Department of Dental Hygiene, our faculty understand that oral health is an important part of overall health, and through quality education, cutting-edge research, and collaboration with others in the national health care community, they are making a difference in the community, the region and beyond.

Gary A. Olson is provost and vice president at Idaho State University.