You are about to venture into an aspect of the oral health professions that may be a new realm to you—one not previously considered as a career possibility. Enter with an open mind, and you can find rewards also not previously considered. Did you enter the profession because you “want to work with people” or “want to help people?” Here is the opportunity to explore new avenues for that personal goal.

This textbook provides an overview of dental public health in greater depth and breadth than the traditional view of community dental hygiene. It builds a foundation in community education and health promotion, but expands to provide a broader view of the core principles and competencies expected at all levels of involvement in public health practice, from part-time volunteer work to a professional career in public health practice.

As depicted on the cover of the text, dental public health involves many entities coming together around a central focus—improving the public’s oral health. When each piece of the puzzle is interconnected, the infrastructure is strong and the benefit to the public is enhanced. This theme is carried throughout the text and each chapter heading depicts pieces of the puzzle addressed in that chapter.

Each chapter is written by a leader in the dental public health community. All have advanced education and expertise in public health. Although primarily written for the dental hygiene student, it is useful for all oral health care providers working in public health settings.

The modular format of the text is specifically designed to allow for flexibility in depth of content or order of presentation for different curricula and teaching styles. Each module centers on a core content area of public health. To accommodate different curricula, the modules can be used in a different sequence than presented. The text also can be used for multiple courses, in the event that public health content is presented in various courses (e.g., statistics, ethics, research, health education, and community dental hygiene).

Key terms are listed at the beginning of each chapter to guide the learner’s study of core concepts. The key terms are often used in public health practice and appear on National Board Examinations. The competencies addressed in each chapter, and listed in Appendix 3, are from the American Dental Education Association’s Competencies for Entry into the Profession of Dental Hygiene. These competencies are not used verbatim in all dental hygiene programs for purposes of accreditation; however, they are the guiding principles for assuring that students are competent for practice and, therefore, remain a useful tool to guide the learner’s study and aid the instructor’s efforts toward that end. Various learning activities are provided for groups or individuals to use inside or outside the classroom. In addition, review questions and answers are provided to reinforce main ideas. Resources, including web sites and search terms, are listed for use with the learning activities, or for more in-depth study and reference. Highlighted at the beginning of each chapter are the stages in the Dental Hygiene Process of Care that are addressed in that chapter as they relate to public health practice.
Module 1: Introduction to Dental Public Health. This module is an introduction to the core principles of public health, with a brief, historical overview of dental public health. This module also highlights more recent trends and the many career opportunities in public health, together with a global perspective of public health from various countries.

Module 2: Program Planning and Evaluation. This module is a primer of public health program planning and evaluation. The module takes the familiar framework of assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, evaluation, and documentation and expands it from the patient care setting to its application in public health settings.

Module 3: Health Promotion and Oral Health Education. This module describes the necessary elements of health promotion and health education programs and model programs. In addition, the module provides resources and instruction for creating culturally appropriate materials for use with public programs.

Module 4: Epidemiology and Research. This module provides an overview of epidemiologic and research principles, both for evaluating public programs and for critically reviewing the scientific literature. It also describes the various forms of scientific communication and includes instruction on how to prepare a written article, an oral presentation, and a poster session or table clinic. The chapter on biostatistics uses specific dental examples and progresses from the fundamental concepts of statistical terminology and central tendency to more advanced concepts, such as logistic regression. Sections of the chapter can be selected for study to meet the needs and depth of the individual program curriculum.

Module 5: Ethics and the Law in Public Health Practice. Most ethics texts focus on individual ethics and private practice implications. This module includes basic ethical concepts and terminology and the process of how laws are developed. In addition, it expands the principles and provides examples in the public health arena, to assist advocacy and social justice efforts for populations.

Module 6: National Board Preparation. This module presents a personalized system and checklist to prepare for the Community Dental Hygiene section of the National Board Dental Hygiene Examination (NBDHE). The module includes sample questions in the testlet format of the NBDHE.
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