

DO YOU KNOW A DENTAL HYGIENE SUPERHERO?



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Jadina Yip, Burnaby, British Columbia

I spotted a job posting that was shared by one of my fellow members of the community oral health provider team at Vancouver Coastal Health. The posting originated with an email from Jay Yip, a VCH dental hygienist who works with individuals who are challenged in various ways. Jay attends our team meetings when she has the capacity to participate. Her work plate is full. However, being curious about this posting for a casual dental hygienist to take on a role in serving the needs of developmentally affected adults, those recovering from disabling brain injury, and those who have lost brain function due to disease or other medical events...I decided to reach out and find out what prompted the job posting. Jay was quick to respond to my inquiry and we agreed to meet on Zoom to discuss this opportunity. I am in awe of Jay after hearing her recount a typical day in her professional life. Jay is a seasoned dental hygienist in her area of expertise. As a sole provider of oral hygiene services in this area of care, it is challenging to carry the responsibilities alone and she does so without complaint.

She works out of GF Strong (a rehabilitation facility) on a multidisciplinary team, which she described as exceptional, with everyone respectful of each member's role in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a care plan for the clients. Jay enjoys the support of her team where she works closely with the nurses in the diagnosis of the client's condition and oral health needs. Often Jay visits clients in their homes and helps caregivers and clients to develop strategies to ensure oral care is provided. She described an incident from that day where she attended a client in their home and found that deteriorating brain function had resulted in the client, who had been compliant during previous home visits, now displaying obstreperous behaviour as Jay attempted to brush the client's teeth. However, with patience and persistence, Jay was able to come to an agreement with the client that she could come another day and perform the care. The way Jay described the encounter was with empathy and care which are the foundations of a superhero dental hygienist. Jay wears many hats while carrying out her care, which includes administration, documentation, coordination of care, determining benefit coverage, linking with other members in the dental community to provide necessary services for this challenging client group, and physically visiting clients in various settings ensuring access to oral care. Her calm, patient approach is evident in her description of this role in dental hygiene.



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Jay navigates the obstacles that have arisen, with COVID-19 being the most recent, but this is against the backdrop of historical difficulties in securing other dental professionals to provide this priority population with dental care services in safe, accessible settings. There are only a handful of dentists who will continue to treat these clients at the fee guide paid by the Ministry of Health, which is below most dentists' fees. Jay's networking and relationship-building skills have been vital in caring for the clients in her care as she has nurtured a community of caregivers for this client group.

My Zoom meeting with Jay revealed the reason that the posting for the casual position was placed. Being the honourable and responsible professional that she is, she is looking at ensuring succession as she considers retirement in the offing. Jay knows that it takes someone who is called to work with this priority population to come alongside in a casual role to eventually take the lead and fill the big shoes that Jay wears in her career. This is a challenge in Vancouver where the cost of housing is a barrier to any worker and the pay level in community health, even when benefits are considered, is lower than that of a dental hygienist in private practice. Jay is hoping to find a dental hygienist who sees the benefit of combining private practice and public health, which gives perspective in providing a full spectrum of care in the profession of dental hygiene. The good news is that there is a hopeful candidate considering the position. I am nominating Jay Yip as SUPERHERO because I too combine public health with a private practice role, including working with the challenging client group that Jay works with exclusively, so I appreciate her unique contribution to my profession. I am proud to have her as a colleague on the dental team at Vancouver Coastal Health. I am impressed by her dedication, commitment to collaboration, and her communication abilities in advocating for this critical area of dental hygiene care in a selfless way. Thank you for providing this venue to celebrate dental hygienists who make a difference in Canada.