

Meet the **third recipient** of the 2019 AAP **SUNSTAR** Innovation Grant



The American Academy of Periodontology's (AAP's) SUNSTAR Innovation grant aims to support member research and promote innovative periodontal treatment. Over three years, the \$250,000 grant program will be divided among six winning principal investigators, who are engaged in research that aims to identify novel and innovative evidence-based periodontal treatment approaches to enhance patient care. The third of this year's recipients, Mia L. Geisinger, DDS, MS, spoke to *Periospectives* asked about her winning research and inspiration.



Development of Multimedia Educational Materials for Caregivers to Enable Optimal Oral Hygiene Provisions for Patients with Dementia

Maria L. Geisinger, DDS, MS
University of Alabama at Birmingham

What is the goal of your research project?

This project seeks to develop multimedia tools that can be used to educate professional and familial caregivers for patients with moderate to severe dementia on delivery of oral hygiene. While patients with dementia can have difficulty caring for their activities of daily living, including oral hygiene care, delivery of those care activities by caregivers can be challenging as patients with dementia oftentimes exhibit care resistant behavior that can reduce time and effectiveness of oral hygiene delivery.

Our team at UAB, in conjunction with geriatric specialist nursing faculty, have developed protocol that reduces care resistant behavior during oral hygiene delivery and seek to utilize multimedia tools to instruct caregivers on these techniques so that this intervention can be scalable and implemented to improve oral health in a greater number of patients with dementia receiving care.

What will this grant allow you to accomplish that you wouldn't have been able to do otherwise?

This grant allows us to leverage work that we are already doing as part of a project through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and create educational materials that can be used on a larger scale to reach a greater number of caregivers, nurses, and—ultimately—patients with dementia.

What inspired the start of your research project?

This project is very close to my heart, as my mother passed away in 2018 after suffering with Atypical Parkinsonism and dementia for many years. When she was in a skilled nursing facility close to my house, I would perform oral hygiene on her regularly. She had a full complement of teeth, was taking medications that caused xerostomia, swallowing difficulties, and she had limited movement of facial muscles all of which made taking care of her teeth more challenging.

I was also involved with projects in conjunction with the UAB school of nursing evaluating ideal strategies for oral hygiene delivery in patients with dementia. Given the prevalence of dementia and the number of individuals over 65 with sophisticated dentistry, this is a huge problem that is getting larger and intervention and training for staff and family members to allow better oral care may improve comfort, health, and outcomes for individuals with dementia. ■