

# Dental hygienist first to open independent practice in Kanata

By SABINE GIBBINS

Staff Writer

Elaine Russell's ideal place to provide oral care for her patients would be on a beach in the Caribbean. Although Kanata's first independent dental hygienist's office may not actually be located near the ocean, this is where Russell would prefer to be when whitening or flossing her patients' teeth.

Still, stepping inside her Kanata Dental Hygiene office on Hazeldean Road in Kanata, one may just get the sense they are in a tropical place.

"It's been a dream of mine for many years to give my clients and patients individualized service," she explains, adding she had been eyeing the office space since last spring.

This has been a dream in the making for many dental hygienists, and not just Russell, whose own goal to open an independent practice has become reality.

It has taken at least 10 years for dental hygienists to be able to practise on their own without a dentist.

For nearly a decade, dental hygienists have been lobbying the Ontario government for this long-awaited legislation to be passed.

On Sept. 1, 2007, they finally got their wish.

On that day, the Ontario government passed Bill 171, a legislation which allows hygienists, such as Russell, to provide services to the public through long-term care facilities, private clinics, community health centres, rural and remote areas and at the same time, improve access to health care.

Additionally, since dental hygienists have portable instruments, they can provide services to under-served areas using mobile clinics.

The only time when a dental hygienist is required to work with a dentist is when the patient is pre-



EMC photo by SABINE GIBBINS

**Elaine Russell is the first Kanata woman to open her own independent dental hygiene practice after a prominent bill was passed by the Ontario government last year, allowing dental hygienists to open their own practice without a dentist.**

sented with specific medical needs.

Dental hygienists are primarily responsible for professional treatment which helps to prevent gum disease and tooth decay. They also assess, plan and implement treatments, and evaluate individual oral care needs.

According to the Ontario Dental Hygienists Association, dental hygiene has been (ODHA) recognized and practised as a profession in Canada for more than 50 years.

Currently, there are approximately 8,000 registered dental hygienists practising in Ontario, which makes dental hygiene one of the largest regulated health professions, according to the ODHA.

For the past five years, this has been a personal goal for Russell, and now, she is the first dental hygienist in Kanata to open her own practice.

"It doesn't happen overnight," she says. "It's hard work."

For Ontarians, she says,

this is very good news.

"Ontario is a big province," says Russell. "This is where it will start. This is where everyone will benefit and it will encourage people to be looked after."

Russell is a member of the Ottawa Dental Hygienists' Society, Ontario Dental Hygienists Association, and the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association.

She worked as a dental assistant and returned to school to become a dental hygienist. In 1985, she graduated from Algonquin College's dental hygiene program and has since enjoyed many years in the dental field.

In her office, she pledges to give her patients the best care in a relaxed environment.

"Oral care is very important," Russell says.

She understands the fear people have when it comes to dental hygiene and dentists, and wants to reassure them - not to put dentists in a negative light - it's a dentist-free office.

"It's a new beginning," she says.

"The people who have been here are very happy to not have a dentist."

The reward in all of this for Russell is knowing she is helping a patient improve their oral care while providing them with quality service in a relaxed environment.

Russell is finding that people enjoy personal care. They like getting to know their hygienist, and being able to form a relationship with them.

And for someone who has been in the business long enough to realize it, Russell loves to see people leave with a smile on their face.

Education is also important, whether it be coaching them along or encouraging them to take better care of their teeth.

According to the ODHA, says Russell, 40 per cent of Ontarians have not had regular oral care, and approximately nine out of ten have some type of gum disease.

One can't build a house without a good foundation, says Russell, so it's important for her to not only provide her patients with superior teeth cleaning, but let them know what they could be doing better to "protect their investment", as she puts it.

However, every person is different; what works for one person may not work for another, she adds.

"This independent dental hygiene office will be more available to the public," she says.

As an added bonus, Kanata Dental Hygiene follows the 2007 Suggested Fee Guide for Dental Hygienists, set by the ODHA. This is an independent fee guide which differs from the Canadian Dental Association Fee Guide used by dentists, so fees, says Russell, are quite a bit less.

"We have our own fees and our own codes," says

Russell.

This is just part of a learning curve, she adds, which everyone has to get used to, but ultimately, it is the public's choice of who they want to see.

At the end of the day, it's about building and developing a relationship with one's oral care provider, says Russell, something she believes is of utmost importance.

"I love to get to know the person behind the smile," she says. "I want people to leave here saying they loved the experience."

As the first independent dental hygienist to open her own practice in Kanata, Russell feels she has a head start on establishing her business and building her patient list.

"I'm paving the way for sure, for other dental hygienists to open," she says.

She hopes to be able to provide service for people of all ages - especially seniors, whom she believes are underserved.

Russell is on the advisory board for the Canadian National Institute of Health and was a keynote speaker to the graduating class in January 2008. She is also a member of the Women's Business Network and the Kanata Chamber of Commerce.

For more information, please go to [www.kanatadentalhygiene.com](http://www.kanatadentalhygiene.com).

## How To Sell Your Home For The Most Amount of Money In The Least Amount of Time

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