



Danielle Clark, Alberta

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Danielle Clark, a clinical instructor at the University of Alberta, as a Dental Hygiene Superhero! I met Danielle in October 2018, in my first year of the dental hygiene program. I am on several medications which have negative effects on my dexterity, making instrumentation difficult. I quickly found myself a month behind my classmates in developing my skills. This is when Danielle stepped in to tutor me 2-3 hours a week apart from class time in the lab. As it turned out, she is an absolute natural at teaching!

To say I found this program is challenging is an understatement and it degraded my confidence. To boot, I was struggling with OCD, anxiety and depression which are genetic, lifelong, conditions for me but were exacerbated by the stress of the program. Amidst all of this, Danielle was my biggest cheerleader. She never gave me false hope, but she reinforced time and time again my upward trajectory of improvement. She provided consistent constructive criticism to help me grow and learn. When I felt I had gotten to know her well enough to share my mental health struggles, she was extremely empathetic and sensitive to my situation. Every step of the way she also made sure my lab coordinator was aware of all the positive strides I was making.

During all this, Danielle was dealing with big events in her personal life. She graduated from her Masters in Oral Biology a month after we met and was applying for her PhD. She was also in the middle of wedding preparations. Despite all this, she went above and beyond in her role as my tutor. She would answer late night texts during which I relayed the improvements and setbacks I experienced during my personal practice time. She would answer my frantic phone calls when I thought an instrumentation exam had gone poorly and would reassure me that it was not the end of the world. I can say with conviction that I never would have survived the fall semester without her support. She never gave up on me and helped me gain confidence that I am capable of success.



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Danielle also has an impressive list of personal accomplishments in the field of dental hygiene. In her last year as an undergraduate dental hygiene student she was a co-leader of SMILE, a classroom program which aims to teach the importance of oral health to young students. Also, she is the first and so far the only Canadian to win the ADEA/Crest Oral-B Scholarships for Dental Hygiene Students Pursuing Academic Careers. And that is only one of over twenty grants/awards/scholarships she has received. She is the first author for twelve publications in prestigious oral health-related journals and is regularly invited to lecture at conferences and seminars.

I was also lucky enough to be Danielle's patient. In December, I saw a periodontist and it was a traumatizing experience I left the appointment in pain and extremely confused about what the issue was. Danielle has previous experience as a periodontal hygienist at the University of Alberta dental clinic so she agreed to see me as a patient. She assured me my condition was reversible and taught me at-home techniques and upon implementation, I saw positive results quickly. I have come to respect Danielle's overall philosophy that it is important for clients to be proactive about taking care of their oral health every day; scaling and fluoride by a hygienist alone is not the solution.

Only half joking, Danielle once told me that she sometimes feels more like a psychologist than a hygienist. She is always willing to lend an ear to her patients and in my case, a shoulder to cry on as well. She has the type of warmth and kindness that is immediately apparent upon meeting her. Overall, she is an extremely talented, compassionate, young lady and has a bright future ahead. And she has a cool superpower too – she's ambidextrous! I am honoured and lucky to consider Danielle my mentor and also my friend.



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