AADR Strides in Science

This month, **Gregg H. Gilbert** is featured in the AADR Strides in Science. Read the article to learn more about him and his research, and to learn about the role AADR has played in his research career.

AADR Strides in Science is a feature highlighting an AADR member's accomplishments and comments on how his/her involvement with the AADR has been an important part of his/her career in research. If you would like to nominate a colleague to be featured, please send his/her name to scienceadvocate@aadronline.org.

Gregg H. Gilbert, DDS, MBA, FAAHD, FICD, is Professor and Chair of the Department of General Dental Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry. Prior to joining the UAB School of Dentistry, he was a Professor at the University of Florida.

Gilbert earned his BS and DDS from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his MBA from the University of Florida, a certificate from Louisiana State University, Charity Hospital, and another certificate from the Veterans Administration, Harvard University.

Gilbert's research career has focused on oral health clinical

research, including its oral epidemiologic and dental behavioral science aspects. He has a special interest in high-risk populations. Currently, Gilbert is the Principal Investigator for two NIH-funded studies: a large Dental Practice-Based Research Network (www.dentalpbrn.org; U01-DE-16747; 2005-2012) and a randomized clinical trial of xylitol for adult dental caries (U01-DE-18049; 2006-2011).

As an active member of IADR and AADR, he has served on the Editorial Board of the IADR/AADR *Journal of Dental Research*, the AADR National Affairs Committee, the IADR Constitution Committee, and most recently the IADR Distinguished Scientist Award Selection Committee. He has also served on numerous grant application review committees for the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Veterans Affairs and research foundations.

Gilbert has received various accolades for his research and in 2002, he received the Distinguished Scientist Award in Geriatric Oral Research from IADR.

Joined AADR in 1984.

What attracted you to the field of dental research and how did you become involved in it?
I was attracted into dentistry initially through a fascination with human physiology and pathology. I chose dentistry because the oral cavity seemed especially interesting, as well to have a career that could avoid dealing with certain problems commonly seen in medicine. After having been accepted into dental school in 1980, I had a light load planned for my last semester as an undergraduate. I therefore walked into what at the time was called the UNC Dental Research Center and asked if they had any student employment positions. I began by washing laboratory glassware in a tissue culture laboratory, and eventually served as a part-time research assistant each year during dental school. This immersed me in research and exposed me to the possibilities of a career in oral health research, thanks to two conscientious faculty mentors, to whom I will always be grateful.

Describe the first time you presented at an AADR Annual Meeting.
I presented results from my tissue culture research as a first-year dental student at the AADR meeting in 1982. I presented in the Hatton Awards competition. Other than a ‘table clinic’ presented at the dental school, this was my first scientific presentation. This was also my first exposure to the

notion that there was an organized dental research organization that provided a place where one could present and network with colleagues.

What are you currently researching?
I am director of "The Dental Practice-Based Research Network" (DPBRN; www.dentalpbrn.org) and this occupies the majority of my time. We have investigated a broad range of clinical research topics using a full range of study designs, successfully engaging more than 1,000 practitioner-investigators from across the United States and Scandinavia. DPBRN emphasizes doing "practical science" about, in, and for the benefit of "real world" clinical practice. This means that the practitioner-investigators and patients themselves actively participate in developing ideas for studies as well as in designing, conducting, and communicating this research - all with the intent of having a direct, practical impact on everyday clinical practice. I also serve as Principal Investigator for the UAB site of a randomized clinical trial called "Xylitol for Adult Caries" (www.kpchr.org/x-act/public/index.aspx?pageid=1), which is a multi-center trial directed by UNC-CH.

How important is it for you to cross-collaborate with other scientific disciplines in order to advance your research?
Interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial to advance this research. It is only through successfully collaborating as respected equals that investigators from diverse scientific disciplines can move clinical science forward in the most expeditious and cost-effective manner. This includes collaborating as equals with clinicians in everyday clinical practice, who I can assure you have an immense amount of practical clinical wisdom.

What do you find to be the most valuable benefit of your AADR membership?
AADR provides an important infrastructure that facilitates oral health researchers' learning about each other's research, interacting in a collegial manner for the benefit of the science, and advocating for oral health research at the societal level. It provides an organized means for our field to stay "on the radar screen" as other fields compete for the attention and dollars of policy makers and the public at large. I am very grateful for AADR's many roles and am very glad to be a part of it.

You're a member of several IADR Scientific Groups. How has participating in these groups helped you as a

researcher?
The scientific groups of which I am a member are welcoming groups that are clearly committed to helping young investigators get integrated into a network of colleagues who will be interested in their work, who may end up being collaborators with them one day, and who collectively can advocate for the value of the type of research that they conduct.

What advice do you offer to your students to help them achieve success in their careers?
The future of oral health research is bright. I advise students to make a point of keeping their eyes and ears open to all of the numerous possibilities that regularly present themselves to advance the health of the nation. They should also make a point of preparing themselves well to contribute to research that capitalizes on these possibilities, and pursue the possibilities about which they are the most invigorated. This sense of invigoration will provide them the energy and focus that is so necessary to be successful long-term.