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THAT'S WHERE PLAQUE CAN HIDE—Dental assistants Rose Hardy (left) and Linda Curley (in chair) brush up on their patient education technique as secretary-receptionist Louise Coates observes. All three are on the staff of Dr. Norman Ross, associate professor of dentistry. (Photo by John Becton)

Nursing Professor Studies What Makes Women Sick?

When a woman leaves such traditional female roles as homemaker, secretary or nurse, does she enter the world of stress-related illness? Or do her attitudes influence her health more than her role?

These are some of the questions Nancy Fugate Woods, associate professor of nursing, is trying to answer in a study supported by a \$3,700 grant from the American Nurses Foundation.

The study, which is a part of her work toward a Ph.D. in epidemiology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, involves about 150 married women between the ages of 20 and 40. It is an attempt to discover what factors influence the rates at which women become ill and what factors influence their behavior during illness.

How To Cope

"I hope to get a better feel for what the problems are and ideas for how to help cope with the broad social change of more and more women

entering the labor force and continuing to be employed even while they are married and have children," Woods said.

"From an epidemiologic standpoint," she said, "I'm trying to find out if there are women who are at high risk for getting sick, in part induced by stress."

"From a nursing standpoint," she added, "I'm looking at broad health care needs of an understudied group — women, particularly employed women. Nurses have a responsibility to look at interventions that can either reduce stress from the environment or help learn better ways of coping."

Finding Answers

Woods said she is trying to answer several questions.

"First, do women who are traditional or feminist in orientation describe their health status differently?" she asks. "The traditional stereotype is that it's okay for women to express their illness. Does the woman's attitude make a difference in the number of symptoms she reports?"

"Second, are women in non-traditional roles expressing more symptoms related to anxiety?" Traditional roles can include work outside the home, Woods pointed out, such as secretarial work or elementary school teaching, while non-traditional roles may vary from driving a truck to being a brain surgeon.

(Continued on page 4)

They're in the Business of Preserving Teeth

By John Becton

While health professionals throughout the medical center work to cure illness and repair injuries, over in one corner of Baker House they are trying to save teeth.

Dr. Norman F. Ross, associate professor of dentistry in the Department of Surgery, has practiced his profession here for 31 years. ("I am now seeing some grandchildren of some of my original patients.")

His office, in 116 Baker House, is like any other well equipped and well staffed, prevention-oriented dental office, except for its special purpose of seeing private hospital patients referred by their physicians, and its obvious convenience for people in the medical center.

The staff includes Louise Coates, secretary/receptionist; Sara Jo Phillips, hygienist; and Rose Hardy and Linda Curley, dental assistants, all "dedicated to preserving teeth for a lifetime," Ross said.

Teeth Don't Grow Back

"Some organs have the ability for self repair, but this is not true of teeth," the dentist said. "You can't buy back teeth as good as the originals," he added.

Thus, a new patient is shown videotapes and given instructions on proper brushing, flossing and other aspects of home care before ever getting into the chair.

Plaque Is the Enemy

Each patient also receives a kit containing a toothbrush, dental floss, mirror, disclosing tablets (to

reveal "plaque") and an instruction sheet.

"Eighty per cent of all tooth loss is due to destruction of surrounding tissue. The other 20 per cent is caused by tooth decay and accidents," Ross said. "Bacterial plaque is the common cause of both decay and inflammation of tissue."

Build-up of plaque, which Ross described as "colonies of bacteria," can be prevented by one thorough cleansing of the teeth each day.

Ross noted that this does not mean just brushing.

"Floss gets the important one-third of the teeth between and around gum margins that a toothbrush cannot reach," he explained. He said that unwaxed floss is much more effective in removing plaque than the waxed variety.

Fluoride Helps

The prevalence of fluoride has saved quite a few teeth in recent years, Ross said. He has seen this firsthand in Durham.

"Having fluoride in the water here is great for children and adults, despite the past controversies," he said.

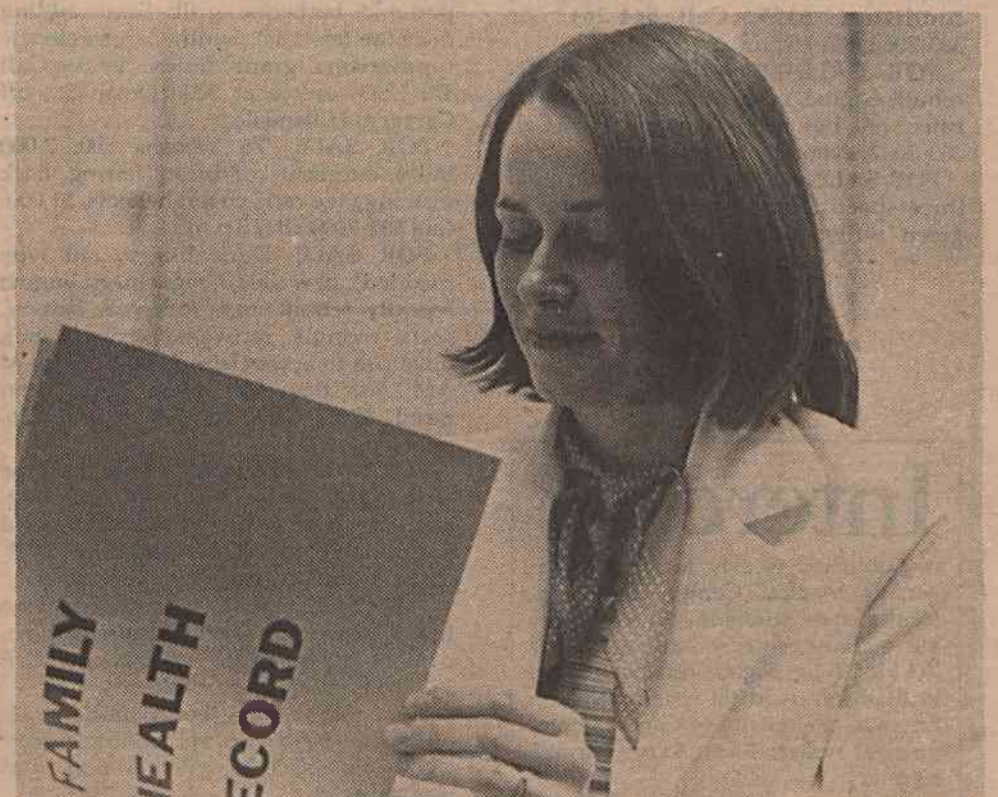
Regular visits to the dentist to have the teeth cleaned, checked and treated as needed to keep small problems from getting out of hand also are vital to preserving teeth.

By working with patients on a long term basis rather than just when a toothache arises or a tooth gets broken, Ross and his staff "have

been pretty successful in training patients to cut their dentistry — and that includes time and money — in half and save their teeth," he said.

A former president of the N.C. Dental Society and current president-elect of the N.C. Dental

(Continued on page 4)



KEEPING TRACK—Nancy F. Woods, associate professor of nursing, is asking about 150 married women to keep a diary of family health for three weeks to help her determine what factors influence both the rates at which women become ill and their behavior during illness (Photo by Ina Fried)