

Meet Michele Rosko:

Paving the way for the next generation of dental assistants

Celebrating 25 years

When the fledgling National Dental Assisting Examining Board (NDAEB) began in 1997, it had only one tool in its tool belt, a written examination. The Board was challenged by regulators to develop a practical exam that would help evaluate entry to practice skills and safe hands in the field of dental assisting. At the time, not much was known about clinical exams and this presented a big challenge for the organization as it decided to expand the NDAEB's offerings.

To move forward, the NDAEB needed an experienced dental assistant and educator. The NDAEB's first CAO, Dave Lamb, thought he knew just the person for the job. He needed someone who could work well in large groups and bring people together from across the country. Michele Rosko fit the bill. Humbled by the opportunity presented to her, Rosko proudly rose to the challenge and led the development of the NDAEB's Clinical Practice Evaluation (CPE), which remains one of the most respected clinical examinations in the country.

Over the last 25 years, the NDAEB and dental assisting as a whole have seen many changes. One thing that has not changed, however, has been Rosko's continuous commitment while serving as the NDAEB's chief evaluator. In this role, she calibrates the clinical practical evaluation and trains NDAEB's session facilitators and clinical evaluators. Needless to say, this is a critical function for the NDAEB.

The NDAEB's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Steve Grundy, emphasizes the importance of having a subject matter expert and clinical expert like Michele, "Having Michele as our Chief Evaluator gives the NDAEB a huge advantage in fulfilling our mission. I ask Michele what she needs to deliver the most successful clinical practical exam possible, I try to provide that, then I get out of the way! She leads our evaluators, and the results speak for themselves."

As a seasoned professional, Rosko brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. Fortunately, it's not just the NDAEB that gets to benefit from her wisdom. Rosko has been teaching at Vancouver Community College (VCC) for the last 36 years. Over the course of her career, Rosko has been immensely grateful for the many experiences that have afforded her the opportunity to serve.



In 2006, Rosko became the 61st president of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. Around that time, Rosko was also chosen by her peers to serve as department head at VCC. Again, she rose to the challenge and fulfilled two six-year terms.

In 2018, however, a door opened that she was not expecting. Rosko was approached by the Dean of the School of Health Sciences at VCC with the opportunity to lead an all-indigenous cohort of dental receptionist students. As a non-Indigenous woman, Rosko was surprised by this opportunity.



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Knowing that education has not always been a safe place for Indigenous people, she felt an enormous sense of responsibility to educate herself and change the narrative to ensure that her students were well supported.

It wasn't easy. Outside of the classroom, many students were struggling with challenges like drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, racism, and intergenerational trauma. "It was truly eye-opening to see all of the barriers to education in one classroom. Coursework aside, it was hard work emotionally," recalls Rosko, "It has inspired and propelled me to engage in formal education in the field of inclusion and anti-racism studies."

For each of these accomplishments, Rosko shares her gratitude. "My colleagues, the Department Heads and Deans at VCC have always been so supportive of all the travel and time needed for these extra professional opportunities," shares Rosko, "they see the value and have made it possible for me to continue to pave a path forward for the profession of dental assisting." And, Rosko adds, "without my husband Randy's abiding support, none of my accomplishments would have been realized."

Rosko also gives credit to the NDAEB's past CAO, Dave Lamb, and current CAO, Steve Grundy, for their unified vision of ensuring dental assistants are the ones designing and overseeing both written and clinical exams. "At the NDAEB, dental assisting is left to the professionals – dental assistants," shares Rosko, "we are the ones maintaining high standards and advocating for the next generation of dental assistants and that is deeply meaningful to me."

The NDAEB's president, Elroy Officer, shares his deep appreciation for Rosko's longstanding commitment, "As one of our founding members of the NDAEB, Michele has seen it all. Her dedication to the NDAEB and the dental assisting profession is unquestioned. She is the ever-present, calming presence in the middle of the CPE storm. Ever so thoughtful, personable, and a true professional in every sense, I'm not sure if the NDAEB's clinical exam would be where it is today without Michele guiding the good ship."

While Rosko acknowledges that the profession of dental assisting has come a long way over the last few decades, she emphasizes that there is still a long way to go. "Dental assistants continue to struggle for self-determination through self-regulation. We have far surpassed our humble beginnings as 'helpers.' Today, graduates possess advanced clinical competence, self-evaluation skills, legal and ethical decision-making abilities, and problem-solving strategies," explains Rosko, "We must stay the charted course and take every opportunity to raise our profile, defining who dental assistants are – responsible, educated, health care professionals and what dental assistants do – play a pivotal and vital role in the delivery of oral health care."

Despite the work that is still to be done, Rosko is extremely hopeful for the next generation of dental assistants, "students are being educated to view themselves as professionals, which is central to the recognition of the profession by others. Because of this paradigm shift in education, dental assisting is changing and we will all be better because of it."

As the NDAEB celebrates its 25th anniversary, we are proud to recognize Michele Rosko as a dental assisting difference maker.

