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## Sue Ellen Richardson, DDS

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### What was your “ah-ha” moment when you knew sleep medicine was for you? / How did you get into sleep medicine?

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The first sleep lecture I attended taught what I later learned was an overly simplistic view: bruxing (or grinding of the teeth) was a means to maintain a patent airway. In short, this meant that breathing—and survival—depended on the bruxing, with often destructive effects for the dentition. I have since learned that this correlation is not so clear; the literature does not agree on the association between bruxing and obstructive sleep apnea. Whatever will be the results of future research, the new paradigm perspective of perceiving the oral cavity as an integral part of the breathing process totally intrigued and fascinated me. I was, and continue to be, quite curious to learn more.

My curiosity was further heightened by my mother’s difficult experience with the prescribed use of a CPAP to deal with her diagnosed sleep apnea. In short, she feared and fought the use of the CPAP, to the point she just flatly refused to use it. With the hope of allowing her to experience more restful sleep, I wanted to learn even more about this dental device.

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### What is the best part of practicing sleep?

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I feel honored by, and cherish being a part of, the process that allows patients to improve control of their lives through healthy sleep. What a privilege to watch these patients become so happily empowered with their own sleep care. A wonderful bonus is becoming part of the positively charged and encouraging sleep community.

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### What's been your favorite or most memorable moment of your career journey so far?

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I have two family memorable moments. The first oral appliance that I made was for my mother. Her diagnostic AHI was 19.8 and her AHI wearing oral device was 1.9. What a fantastic way to jump-start my love for sleep medicine! Because of my wonderfully random and serendipitous move into sleep and my amazing sleep doctor friends, my daughter was diagnosed with narcolepsy within six months of her first symptoms. She did not have to suffer very long with her new terrifying, confusing, incapacitating struggles and changes after a severe bout of flu. I will forever be grateful beyond belief for her early diagnosis.

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### What has been the most enjoyable experience as a member of AASM?

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I enjoy the supportive sleep family, and the AASM creates the center for this sleep world. The AASM enables ways for interactions within the entire sleep field. In person, the AASM has various sleep meetings which has allowed me to learn from researchers about their latest findings and forms a fun place to catch up with my friends. With a much more accessible way to connect, the AASM Engage Community encourages communication because we share our day-to-day ideas and concerns.

## **If you could offer one piece of advice to someone who wants to get into the sleep field, what would it be and why?**

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I have been blessed with amazing mentors, both dentists and physicians. Make use of the AASM and any specific allied group, which in my case is the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine (AADSM), for ways to study and meet others in the field. I go to meetings of both academies and learn from both the speakers and fellow colleagues. Also, state and local sleep groups offer meetings and provide nearby opportunities to talk with others in sleep.

Become involved online with the AASM Engage Community and other online sleep associations. On those forums, clinicians ask and answer questions in addition to sharing their successes, failures, and new advances.

I find the people in sleep to be very welcoming and inclusive. It didn't take me long to feel at home with the friendly sleep community.

## **List three hashtags that describe you**

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#NeedMyDaughterForHashtagGuidance

#FeelHonoredToBeAASMSpotlighted

#WelcomeSleepMeeting2024ToMyHomeTown