GDA SM

ACTION

April · 2026

Journal of the Georgia Dental Association

FEATURES:

2026 GDA Convention & Expo ▸ PG. 8

Strategic Plan ▸ PG. 20

2025 Year-in-Review Report ▸ PG. 32

COOL TOOLS

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CALL FOR 2027 Award Nominations

The GDA's Awards Council is actively seeking nominations for 2027 award recipients for Honorable Fellow, Oral Discoveries and Inventions, Community Service, and Award of Merit! All nominations should be submitted to the GDA office by November 1, 2026.

In order to be considered for one of these awards, candidates should exhibit the following qualifications:

Honorable Fellow:
Distinguished service to the GDA, either through active participation in the GDA or the local component society. Candidates must have active membership in the GDA for at least 10 consecutive years.

Oral Discoveries and Inventions:
A GDA member who has made significant contributions in the area of oral discoveries or inventions. Self-recommendations will not be accepted.

Community Service:
This award recognizes GDA members who distinguishes him or herself by extraordinary service to the quality of life and health of persons in their local, state, national, or international community via the field of dentistry. Qualifications include contributing significantly to enriching the quality of life and improving the health of those served, and outstanding leadership and humanitarian volunteer accomplishments. Candidates must have active membership in the GDA for at least 10 consecutive years.

Award of Merit:
It is the intent that this award be given only when a candidate has truly exhibited service and merit above recognized standards and may not necessarily be given each year. It is not necessary that the exemplary service and merit shall have been exhibited in the specific year of consideration. It is the intention that the GDA Award of Merit be the highest honor that the GDA can bestow upon a member, and in keeping, the standards for judging a candidate shall be the highest possible.

For more information or to nominate a colleague please visit the GDA website:

Don't miss the chance to recognize excellence within the dental community!

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GDA
GDAPAC
political action committee

Golf Tournament

Callaway Gardens | May 8, 2026

Tee off with purpose at the GDAPAC Golf Tournament! This exciting event brings together GDA members, legislators, and supporters for a day of friendly competition, networking, and fun, all while raising crucial support for the GDAPAC.

The tournament is open to everyone, including guests and friends outside the dental profession. Register as an individual player for $200 or as a team of four for $600. Don't miss your chance to swing into action for dentistry!

Scan the QR code to register!

GDA AT JEKYLL: The Company We Keep

DR. RHODA J. SWORD
GDA Editor

Hello my GDA friends!

A few months ago, as I was driving to Atlanta for GDA LAW Day at the Georgia Capitol (if you missed it this year, PLEASE come next year!), I was reminded of some notable road trips I took in college. Using my college logic and passion for driving and travel, somehow I justified a trip from my hometown of Statesboro, GA, back to college at Baylor University in Waco, TX, making stops in Chicago and Iowa. It just so happened that my now husband lived in Iowa, and this was a good excuse to "drop by" to see him in his natural habitat. Another notable road trip was with my best friend in her small Toyota Tercel from Statesboro to Arizona, by way of Texas and the Grand Canyon. Since that was several years ago, we did not have GPS or regular smart phones. We set out with a bag phone, only turned on for emergencies, and a Rand McNally paper atlas. We were PIRATES! We found all of our destinations and even camped out along the way in my friend's tent. That trip has become a true highlight of our many years of friendship and memories we have together!

It reminds me of the black and white drawing of a tiny dragon riding on a panda, with bamboo and mountains in the background, walking along a path.

"Which one is more important," asked Big Panda, "the journey or the destination?"

"The company," said Tiny Dragon.

What a poignant truth to our journey through life and especially our professional career. In my journey to be a dentist, I remember the hard work and the discipline it took to prepare myself intellectually to apply to dental school, then to go through dental school. While I remember each course and what I learned, most of my best stories and true belly laughs come from my classmates and how we endured those four years. It was the company!

As you progress in your dental careers, whether you are right at the beginning, middle or nearing the sunset years, think of those who journey with you. Your family is so important, first, but so is your dental family. Without your dental classmates, dental peers, practice partners, and GDA connections, your dental life would not be as rewarding!

We are preparing for an incredible meeting on Jekyll Island that can truly check all the boxes for time well spent!

- ☑ Vacation at a beautiful location (Jekyll Island, GA, beach views with waves crashing)
- ☑ Exceptional CE (get a head start on your CE needed for the biennium)
- ☑ Connecting with your friends, soon-to-be friends, and fellow dentists
- ☑ Spending quality time with your family at the beach and/or pool during down times

Memories are going to be made. We want you to be part of them. Consider fitting this into your summer. We need you at the meeting!

Get Involved

Consider being part of your district leadership. There are seats open for district delegates and alternate delegates, which is the perfect introduction to GDA leadership. Having a robust and effective GDA/ADA/District means we are all sharing our voices and making it what we want!

I remember getting so excited about being part of the GDA House of Delegates as a voting member. As a young dentist, my one vote counted just as much as the 30-year members and officers in the organization. I felt part of something bigger than myself, and it felt very special! I looked around and saw the names of the GDA greats standing up at the mic and sitting up at the podium as the state leadership. I am so humbled that I can sit up there now and do my small part in shaping this truly amazing and 100% member-focused organization. When you think of being more active, please consider it as watering the seeds of the profession that has shaped you and guides your daily life. A beautiful garden cannot flourish without some pruning and some watering and some tending. Our Immediate Past-President, Dr. Amber Lawson reminded us of this in one of her inspirational writings to us. We all enjoy the beautiful garden and its flowers. Let us all enjoy the discipline that goes into making it what it has become.

On Instagram, I saw a beautiful video from Eliud Kipchoge, the Kenyan long-distance runner, Olympic champion, and one of the greatest marathon runners of all time. He is standing at a podium and says, "Only the disciplined ones are free in life. If you are undisciplined, you are a slave to your moods. You are a slave to your

passions. The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago. The second and the best time is today. Plant the tree of self-discipline."

Rather than saying, "Oh I should have started doing _____ years ago. I wish I had ____," plant a tree today. Sign up today! Email or text your District Leadership to find out when your next meeting is held. Go up to the leaders and offer to be an alternate delegate. Offer to be on a committee at the GDA level. We need your perspective. We need your voice. The GDA is made up of its members and is strongest with all member input.

Presidential Initiatives

We currently have another exceptional President, Dr. Peter Shatz, whose vision is "Igniting the Future!" His initiatives include:

- **First**, adopting strategies that position the GDA for long-term success, ensuring adaptability, resilience, and sustainable growth while strengthening the structure and efficiency of our governance.
- **Second**, fostering and sustaining long-term membership growth by creating a welcoming environment for all Georgia dentists and encouraging active engagement and volunteerism across the association.
- **Third**, preparing GDA members for innovation and change in the healthcare industry, equipping our members to navigate evolving technologies, regulations, and patient care models.

Come to Jekyll Island.
Come to a District Meeting!
Bring your expertise, experience, and professionalism. Bring yourself.
We need you and cannot wait to see you in a few short months!

Take care, Dr. Rhoda J. Sword

CALL for Leadership Nominations!

The GDA is strong because of the dedicated and hard-working members who volunteer their time and talents. Be a part of contributing to the GDA's excellence and ensuring your voice is heard by serving in volunteer leadership!

Position openings include:

- GDA Board of Trustees
- GDA Foundation Board
- GDIS Board

Questions? Contact **Jeannie Watson** at *jeannie@gadental.org* or **404.636.7553, ext. 108.**

GDA CONVENTION & EXPO 2026

July 2-4, 2026 | Jekyll Island, GA

CATCH YOU ON THE *Coast!*

GDA CONVENTION & EXPO 2026
July 2-4, 2026 | Jekyll Island, GA

TOP EVENTS TO ATTEND

Exhibit Hall Welcome Reception | 4:30 – 6:30 PM
Thursday | July 2

Kick off your 2026 Annual Meeting experience in the newly redesigned Exhibit Hall, your one-stop-shop for discovering the latest in dental technology, supplies, and services. Meet trusted vendors face-to-face, explore solutions that can elevate your practice, and build relationships that matter. Enjoy an open bar as you browse and stick around for exciting door prizes at 4:30 and 5:15 PM, plus a $250 cash giveaway at 5:45 (must be present to win).

Awards & Keynote Breakfast | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Friday | July 3

Everyone is invited to join us for a morning of recognition, connection, and inspiration. The Awards & Keynote Breakfast is your chance to applaud your colleagues who are shaping the future of the GDA and to feel renewed pride in the profession. You'll also hear from keynote speaker Carlin Isles, whose powerful story (featured on page 12) will leave you inspired and ready for the day's events.

Exhibitor Happy Hour on the Beach | 3:30 – 5:30 PM
Friday | July 3

Meet exhibitors in a relaxed, beachside setting while enjoying complimentary drinks and great company. This happy hour is the perfect way to connect, unwind, and enjoy the coastal views. All attendees and exhibitors are welcome to join.

Cornhole Tournament | 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Saturday | July 4

Start your 4th of July with a little sunshine, some friendly competition, and a whole lot of fun! Join us on the beach for our first ever Cornhole Tournament! The perfect break from conference sessions and the ultimate way to kick off Independence Day. Feel the ocean breeze, enjoy the early-day energy, and toss a few beanbags as business casual meets red, white, and blue. This all-ages tournament welcomes players of every skill level—from first-time tossers to cornhole champions. Even better, every game played helps support The GDA Foundation for Oral Health, making this a feel-good way to celebrate the holiday.

New Dentist & First-Time Attendee Reception | 5:30 – 7:00 PM
Saturday | July 4

Keep the 4th of July energy going at our New Dentist & First-Time Attendee Reception! This event is the perfect opportunity for new dentists and first-time attendees to connect with peers and learn from seasoned colleagues, while experienced dentists can share stories, advice, and build relationships with the next generation of dentists. Enjoy drinks, great conversations, and networking that leads right into the 4th of July Celebration. * Adults only

GDA Celebration | 7:00 – 10:00 PM
Saturday | July 4

Celebrate the 4th of July with family and friends! Enjoy festive food and a cash bar, carnival games, blow-up slides, face painting, henna, and two caricature artists. End the night with a front-row view of the fireworks over the ocean–fun for all ages!

GDA CONVENTION &EXPO 2026
July 2-4, 2026 | Jekyll Island, GA

CONVENTION AGENDA

WEDNESDAY | July 1

7:30 AM — **Registration Open** | 7:30 AM – 5:00 PM

1:00 PM — **CE Course** | 1:00 – 5:00 PM

- **Botulinum Toxin (Botox®) Training for Dentists** | 1:00 – 5:00 PM | Chris Croley, MD

THURSDAY | July 2

6:30 AM — **Registration Open** | 6:30 AM – 6:00 PM

12:00 PM — **Exhibit Hall** | 12:00 – 4:30 PM

12:30 PM — **CE Courses** | 12:30 – 5:00 PM

- **Opioid Prescribing Standards for Dentists: What the DEA Wants You to Know** | 12:30 – 2:00 PM | Derek Barr, Diversion Investigator at the Drug Enforcement Agency
- **From Survival to Significance: Finding Purpose, Balance, and Connection in Dentistry** | 2:15 – 3:15 PM | Elijah Desmond
- **Georgia Board of Dentistry Panel** | 3:30 – 5:00 PM | Georgia Board of Dentistry

4:30 PM — **Exhibit Hall Welcome Reception** | 4:30 – 6:30 PM

– Discover the latest dental products, network with vendors, and enjoy prizes and an open bar!

GDA CONVENTION &EXPO2026
July 2-4, 2026 | Jekyll Island, GA

CONVENTION AGENDA

FRIDAY | July 3

7:00 AM

Sunrise Yoga on the Beach ($10) | 7:00 – 8:00 AM

8:00 AM

Registration Open | 8:00 – 10:00 AM

10:00 AM

Awards & Keynote Breakfast | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
– Celebrate GDA members' achievements and get inspired by Carlin Isles, with breakfast available starting at 9:45 AM.

12:00 PM

Exhibit Hall | 12:00 – 3:00 PM
– Raise a glass with Bloody Marys and treat yourself to ice cream!

12:30 PM

CE Courses | 12:30 – 4:00 PM

- **Bad Review! What to Do?** | 12:30 – 1:30 PM | Len Tau, DMD
- **Blueprint to Breakthrough: Smart Moves & Costly Mistakes When Building Your Dream Dental Practice** | 12:30 – 1:30 PM | Ed Pease
- **Safer Smiles: Dental Care for Bleeding Disorders in Today's Advanced Era** | 1:45 – 2:45 PM | Bobby "Duc" Tran, MD, MSc
- **STOP Overpaying Your Taxes and PROTECT Your Wealth** | 1:45 – 2:45 PM | Art McOmber
- **Salivary Testing & Diagnostics** | 3:00 – 4:00 PM | Zulema Valdivia, DDS
- **Trends in the Business of Dentistry Panel** | 3:00 – 4:00 PM | GDA Endorsed Partners

3:30 PM

Exhibitor Happy Hour on the Beach | 3:30 – 5:30 PM
– Unwind with exhibitors in a relaxed beachside setting—enjoy drinks, conversation, and networking for all attendees!

GDA CONVENTION &EXPO2026
July 2-4, 2026 | Jekyll Island, GA

CONVENTION AGENDA

SATURDAY | July 4

7:00 AM — **Sunrise Yoga on the Beach** ($10) | 7:00 – 8:00 AM

9:30 AM — GDA foundation FOR ORAL HEALTH **Cornhole Tournament** ($25) | 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

– Start your 4th of July with sunshine, fun, and friendly competition at our first-ever Cornhole Tournament on the beach! Open to all ages and skill levels, it's a perfect break from conference sessions. Toss some beanbags, enjoy the ocean breeze, and support The GDA Foundation for Oral Health.

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED BY Tuesday | June 30

Scan the QR code **TO REGISTER** for Convention or modify your current registration:

12:00 PM — **ICD/ACD/PFA Joint Luncheon** (Fellows Only – $85) | 12:00 – 2:00 PM

5:30 PM — **New Dentist & First-Time Attendee Reception** | 5:30 – 7:00 PM

– Network, share stories, and connect with colleagues at the New Dentist & First-Time Attendee Reception!

7:00 PM — **GDA Celebration** | 7:00 – 10:00 PM

– Celebrate the 4th of July with family fun, carnival games, food, and a front-row fireworks view!

Keynote Speaker
CARLIN ISLES

Carlin Isles is a two-time U.S. Olympian and world-renowned rugby star celebrated as one of the fastest players the sport has ever seen. Known for his explosive speed and electrifying presence, he rose from humble beginnings in Ohio to the global stage through discipline, faith, and purpose.

Before rugby, Carlin was an All-American sprinter with a 10.13 in the 100m and spent time with the Detroit Lions. His bold transition to rugby propelled him to international stardom, earning spots in the 2016 Rio and 2020 Tokyo Olympics and millions of views on highlight reels featuring his signature breakaway runs.

Off the field, Carlin holds an MBA and inspires audiences to break limitations, embrace their gifts, and pursue greatness. His speaking style is energetic, faith-driven, and contagious—reminding us that with heart and discipline, anything is possible.

2026 GDA Convention & Expo Sponsors!

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THE NEW REPUTATION ADVANTAGE: How Culture, Experience, and Systems Will Define Dental Leaders in 2026

DR. LEN TAU
"The Reviews Doctor"

A few months ago, I spoke with a dentist who was genuinely confused.

His practice had accumulated more than 2,000 Google reviews. His rating was strong. His clinical care was excellent. Yet his new patient numbers were slipping, and his visibility in local search was declining.

"I don't get it," he told me. "We've done everything right."

On paper, he had.

In reality, he was relying on a reputation strategy that belonged to another era.

For more than a decade, dentists were taught to focus on one primary goal: get more Google reviews. For a long time, that advice worked. Reviews improved rankings, increased visibility in Google Maps, and reassured hesitant patients that a practice was trustworthy. Even today, Google reviews remain important.

But in 2026, relying on Google alone is no longer enough.

Reputation is no longer measured on a single platform. It is evaluated across an entire digital ecosystem, increasingly by artificial intelligence systems that decide who gets seen, recommended, and trusted before a patient ever clicks a link. Reputation has quietly shifted from something patients read to something platforms judge.

Since becoming head of the dental division of Birdeye in 2014, I have had a front-row seat to this transformation. I have seen firsthand how reviews reshaped not only my own practice, but also thousands of practices across the United States and Canada. Over more than a decade, reputation evolved from a secondary marketing tactic into one of the most powerful drivers of visibility, credibility, and patient growth.

Few forces in modern dental marketing have had a greater impact than reviews. Yet today, reviews alone are no longer the differentiator.

The practices that will lead in the coming years understand a fundamental truth: reputation is not a tactic. It is the outcome of culture, experience, and systems working together.

Not long ago, the patient journey was predictable. Someone searched for a dentist, compared a few profiles, checked Google ratings, and made a decision. Today, that process often starts earlier and ends sooner. Search engines, AI tools, and recommendation systems now filter options before patients ever begin comparing practices.

Your reputation is being evaluated by machines before it is reviewed by humans.

These systems analyze credibility, consistency, and confirmation across multiple sources. They look for alignment between what patients say, what your website shows, and how your practice presents itself everywhere else it appears. When your digital presence tells a clear and consistent story, you are more likely to be surfaced. When it exists in only one place, you are increasingly overlooked.

At the same time, patients are changing how they search. Many now use conversational tools, voice assistants, and AI platforms to ask detailed questions about comfort, communication, and experience. AI systems respond by scanning enormous volumes of information, including websites, social platforms, directories, testimonials, review language, and engagement behavior.

They are searching for validation.

One strong signal is no longer enough. Consistency is what builds algorithmic trust.

This is why momentum now matters more than volume. While a large review count still has value, recency has become far more important. Ongoing feedback signals that a practice is active, relevant, and still being chosen today. When reviews slow, visibility often declines. A steady flow of authentic feedback consistently outperforms large but stagnant profiles.

Despite these technological shifts, the foundation of reputation has not changed.

Dr. Len Tau
GDA CONVENTION &EXPO 2026
SPEAKER
Look for:
"Bad Review! What to Do!"
Friday – July 3

Reputation is built on culture, not technology.

One of the biggest misconceptions in dentistry is that reputation can be managed primarily through software. It cannot. Tools amplify what already exists. No system can compensate for an average patient experience. If the experience is forgettable, the reviews will be forgettable. If it is exceptional, patients will talk about it without being prompted.

The strongest practices focus relentlessly on how patients feel at every touchpoint, from the first phone call to post-treatment follow-up. Every team member understands that every interaction shapes perception. That shared understanding is reputation culture.

Most dental visits today are clinically competent. Very few visits are emotionally memorable.

Patients do not write reviews about protocols or equipment. They write about how they were treated. They remember who listened, who reassured them, who followed up, and who showed genuine care. These "Wow" moments are rarely expensive. They are intentional, built through empathy, personalization, and consistency.

Emotional connection drives storytelling. Storytelling drives reputation.

In most markets, clinical excellence is assumed. Clean offices, modern technology, and skilled providers are standard. From a patient's perspective, many practices look identical. Culture and experience are what break that sameness.

When patients consistently describe your team as compassionate, organized, and trustworthy, you stop competing on price and convenience. You compete on relationship. That advantage is extremely difficult to copy.

Technology still plays an essential role, not as a replacement for human connection, but as a way to sustain it. High-performing practices use systems to ensure consistency, responsiveness, and accountability. Automation helps ensure no patient is forgotten, no feedback is ignored, and no opportunity for appropriate follow-up is missed. When used correctly, systems protect culture rather than dilute it.

In leading practices, reputation is not managed through campaigns. It is sustained through systems. Feedback is requested consistently, monitored thoughtfully, and used internally for coaching and improvement. Negative reviews are treated as insights, not threats.

Feedback becomes data. Data becomes improvement. Improvement becomes loyalty.

Reputation has always been the byproduct of culture, but in 2026, culture must be visible to be believable. A five-star review is the invitation. Your website and social media are the house tour.

If a patient reads a glowing review about a warm, compassionate team and then clicks through to a website filled with sterile, outdated stock photos, trust breaks instantly. The story no longer matches the evidence.

Practices that lead are intentional about making culture visible. Authentic photos and videos of the team in action do more than tell people who you are. They allow patients to feel it. That emotional confirmation often determines whether a patient chooses you before ever walking through the door.

This visibility also creates a powerful secondary effect. By consistently sharing your authentic story across your website, social platforms, and video channels, you create an omnipresent digital footprint. Your culture becomes discoverable everywhere patients and technology look for trust signals.

Modern AI systems do not simply count reviews. They analyze language, themes, sentiment, and consistency. They scan websites, social content, and transcripts to confirm whether what patients are saying aligns with what your brand is showing.

When culture is consistent everywhere, reviews are reinforced. Credibility compounds. Trust becomes unavoidable.

Google reviews still matter, and they always will. But in 2026, they no longer operate in isolation. Reputation has become a visibility engine, a trust signal, and a gateway into AI-driven discovery. It is shaped by leadership, reinforced by culture, expressed through experience, and sustained by systems.

Practices that invest in all four earn something more valuable than rankings. They earn trust.

From platforms. From patients. From communities.

Before worrying about the next review request, it is worth taking a different kind of audit. When was the last time you evaluated the culture inside your office? Is creating remarkable experiences reinforced every day, or is it just a slogan on the wall? In your morning huddle, are you simply reviewing the schedule, or are you setting expectations for how each patient should feel when they leave?

The real competitive advantage is not a tactic. It is a standard.

If culture drives experience, experience drives stories, and systems capture those stories consistently, the result is reputation that scales. That is what search engines learn to trust, and more importantly, what patients choose to trust.

As I often remind dentists:

You do not control what patients say...

You control the experience that inspires them to say it.

GDA**MEMBER**PROFILE

This column highlights GDA members talking about their path to dentistry and the value they find in GDA membership. This month we hear from **Jay Phillips, DMD**.

GDA

Jay Phillips, DMD

JAY PHILLIPS, DMD

GDA DISTRICT:
Southwestern District Dental Society

PLACE OF WORK:
Tift Regional Dental Group

DENTAL SPECIALTY:
General

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to farm. My family was involved in agriculture—either farming or through my father's work with the Georgia Department of Agriculture. I started college at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College pursuing an agronomy degree. But while I was there, it seemed like every door in agriculture was starting to close. Agriculture was going through some tough times then.

I was working with a chemical company doing agricultural research and really enjoyed that, but it was a big company and there wasn't a lot of job security. I knew I would probably be a little frog in a big pond. Around that time, I read a pamphlet about dentistry and started thinking about the dentists I knew. They all had good reputations and were respected professionals in their communities.

What stood out to me was that they had a profession where they could help people, get to know a lot of people, and build close relationships, while still having some balance in life. I thought dentistry might give me the opportunity to work four days a week and farm three. But once I got into dental school, I fell in love with the profession—the art of dentistry and especially the people I got to know. Those relationships are still the most important thing to me.

What inspired you to become a dentist?

In a lot of ways, it was those tough times in agriculture that really set me on the path to dentistry. I knew several older farmers who were struggling, and they encouraged me to look for something outside of agriculture and keep farming as more of a hobby rather than something I depended on to support a family.

Looking back now, I'm very thankful those doors closed, because that's what led me to dentistry.

Which GDA benefit has been the most valuable to you?

That's kind of like choosing your favorite child—they're all important, not just to me personally but to my practice as well. But if I had to pick one, it would probably be advocacy.

Dentistry has faced a lot of challenges over the years. One that really stands out to me was early in my career when there were major discussions around amalgam and how that might affect the future of the profession. Organized dentistry stepped in during that time and helped guide things in the right direction, and I'm very grateful for that.

Has anything over the years been a game changer for you and your patients?

Technology has changed dentistry a lot, and it's continuing to change rapidly. I'll admit there was a time when I was pretty resistant to some of that technology. But I do see now how it helps make dentistry more accurate and ultimately better for our patients. It doesn't necessarily make the profession easier, but it does help us deliver better care.

But if I had to say what's really been the biggest game changer in my practice, it's the people. I've been blessed with an incredible staff, and many of them have been with me since day one. It's really that group of people who takes care of our community—not just me. In my opinion, people matter even more than technology or any other tool we use.

What advice would you give to a dental student?

One thing I've always believed is that life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain. There are going to be storms in your career, and that's one reason organized dentistry is so important.

My advice would be to get involved early. Even if it's just paying your dues and being a member, that matters. But beyond that, get involved in your district, get to know people, and build those relationships. The people you meet and the things you learn about your profession and the direction it's headed will carry you a long way in your career and make you a much happier dentist.

And learn everything you can, not just for a grade. Sooner or later, the things you learn are going to change someone's life, and they could even save someone's life. The relationships you build in this profession are what make it possible to really take care of people. That's what it's all about.

What is a fun fact about yourself?

A lot of people don't realize that I'm still pretty involved in farming. These days it's mostly timber and cattle. It's not a large span, but it keeps me outside, and I love being outdoors.

I also really enjoy hunting, especially deer hunting. For more than 20 years, I've harvested deer only with a bow. It's definitely tougher, but it makes it a lot more rewarding when everything works out. You have to work harder for it, and that's part of what I enjoy.

What is one Georgia spot you think everyone should visit?

Georgia has a lot of beautiful places and a lot of history, but if I had to pick one place, it would be Sapelo Island. If you ever get the chance to go, I'd definitely recommend it.

There's a small community there made up of descendants of people who were brought to the coastal islands as slaves to work on plantations. They've preserved a lot of their heritage, their language, and their way of life, and I find that really interesting. Hog Hammock is a place worth seeing if you visit.

The other thing that makes Sapelo special is the natural beauty of the Barrier Islands in their native state. In my opinion, Sapelo has done a better job preserving that than almost anywhere else. It looks very different from the developed coastline we're used to seeing, and it's absolutely beautiful.

Without saying "I'm a dentist," how would you answer someone who asks what you do for a living?

I would say, "I change people's lives." Dentistry is such an amazing profession—not just from the healthcare aspect, but from the relationship aspect of getting to know people. We have the opportunity to work in our communities for the betterment of the people who live and work there. I think every dentist has had a moment where they didn't realize someone was going through a tough time, but were able to help them—maybe even through pro bono dentistry—and see how that care changed their life in some way. To me, that's what dentistry is all about: changing people's lives.

LAW Day 2026 RECAP

More than 110 GDA dentists and students from the Dental College of Georgia showed up in force for LAW Day 2026 at the Georgia State Capitol, and their impact was unmistakable. Recognized in both the House and Senate, attendees met face-to-face with lawmakers to advocate for critical budget priorities, advance meaningful dental insurance reform, and strengthen oral health outcomes for communities across Georgia.

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GDA LAUNCHES: GDA 2026–2028 Strategic Plan

GDA Compass

Kristen Morgan, GDA Executive Director

GDA is proud to announce the launch of its 2026–2028 strategic plan, ***GDA Compass***. Designed to guide the association over the next three years, *GDA Compass* will strengthen the organization, advance its mission, and better serve members across Georgia. In conjunction with the plan, GDA's vision and mission statements have been updated to align with its new goals and priorities.

The development of *GDA Compass* began at the 2025 meetings of the Board of Trustees and House of Delegates, where members participated in strategic planning sessions facilitated by a strategic planning consultant. These sessions established a shared vision, identified priority areas, and defined goals and metrics to guide the three-year plan, which focuses solely on the GDA and its members. Unlike the previous plan, the *GDA Compass* does not include subsidiaries, allowing the association to concentrate fully on initiatives that directly benefit members and strengthen the core organization.

Through this process, the association reached strong alignment around several key initiatives. These priorities were shared with the Strategic Planning Task Force, appointed by GDA President Dr. Amber Lawson, which developed specific goals and strategies. The Task Force presented the finalized 2026–2028 strategic plan to the Board of Trustees at its December meeting, where it received unanimous approval. GDA staff have since begun developing an operational plan to ensure alignment with the plan's goals and successful implementation.

"This strategic plan provides clarity and direction for GDA as we look to the future," said Kristen Morgan, GDA Executive Director. "*GDA Compass* ensures that our work is aligned with our mission and positions the association to meet the evolving needs of our members and the profession."

Implementation of *GDA Compass* is underway, with GDA actively integrating the plan into operational priorities and initiatives. Regular updates will be shared with members to track progress and highlight successes as the association works toward achieving its goals.

In conjunction with the new strategic plan, GDA's vision and mission statement have been updated to reflect its goals and priorities.

Mission Statement:

- To create a supportive and connected environment for dentists statewide, equipping them with the resources, education, advocacy, and community needed to thrive and to inspire them to improve lives through accessible high-quality oral healthcare.

Vision Statement:

- The Georgia Dental Association is the trusted voice advancing the future of dentistry.

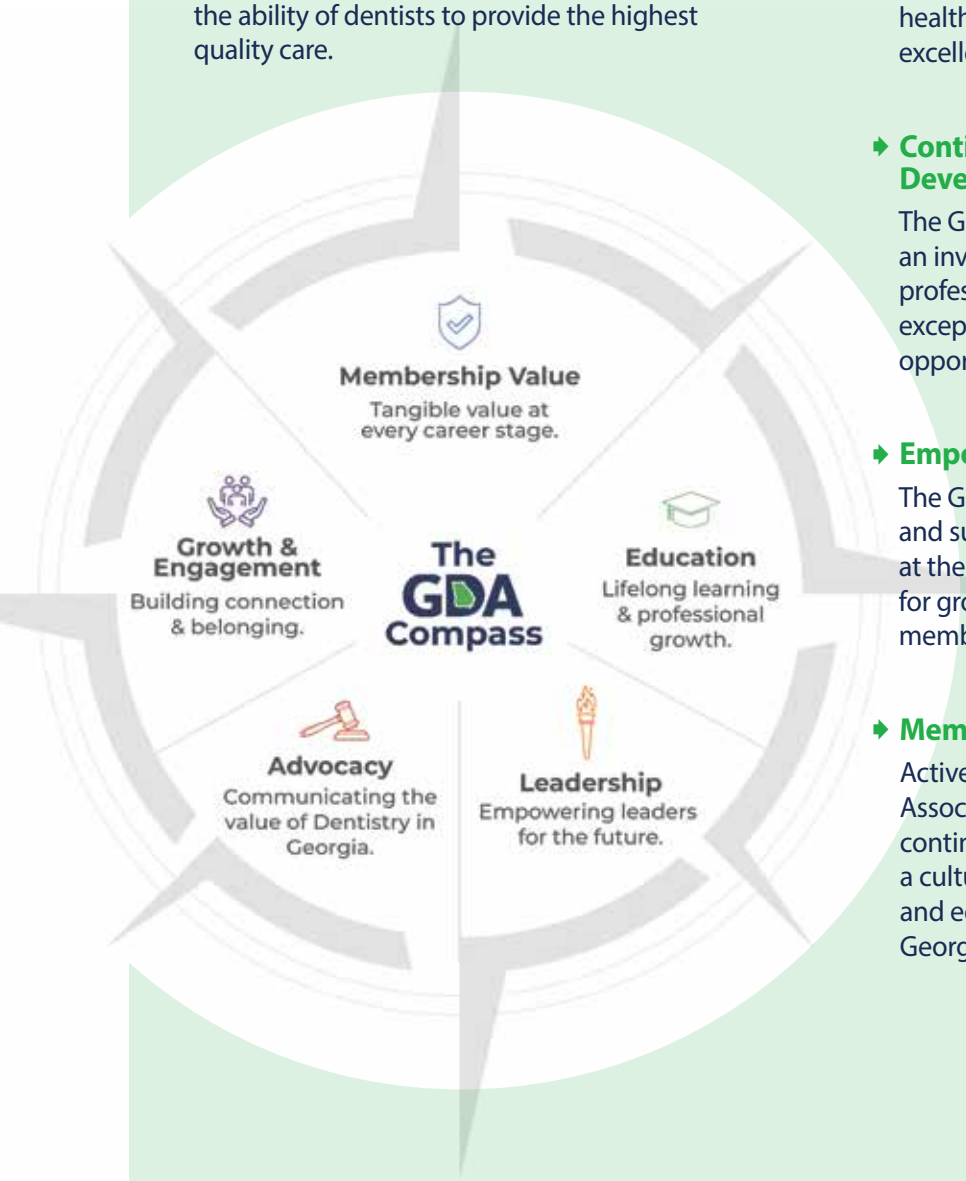
Strategic Plan Key Areas

GDA Compass focuses on five key areas designed to advance the association's mission and strengthen support for members. For each area, the association developed clear goals, success indicators, and strategies to guide the organization over the next three years.

Key Areas:

Legislative & Public Advocacy - Communicating the Value of Dentistry in Georgia

The Georgia Dental Association will be the trusted voice of dentistry in Georgia, advocating for our members, advancing the profession, and protecting the ability of dentists to provide the highest quality care.



Strengthening Membership Value

The Georgia Dental Association is where dentists turn for guidance and growth—empowering them with mentorship, advocacy, and resources to build thriving practices, deliver exceptional oral health care, and uphold dentistry as a profession of excellence and impact within every community.

Continuing Education and Professional Development

The Georgia Dental Association is positioned as an invaluable resource supporting our members' professional and personal development through exceptional continuing education and training opportunities.

Empowering GDA Leadership for the Future

The Georgia Dental Association will foster a strong and sustainable leadership pipeline beginning at the district level, broadening opportunities for growth and engagement, and strengthening member value through volunteer development.

Membership Growth and Engagement

Active participation in the Georgia Dental Association—starting in dental school and continuing throughout a dentist's career—fostering a culture of community, collaboration, growth, and education while serving as a unified voice for Georgia's dentists.

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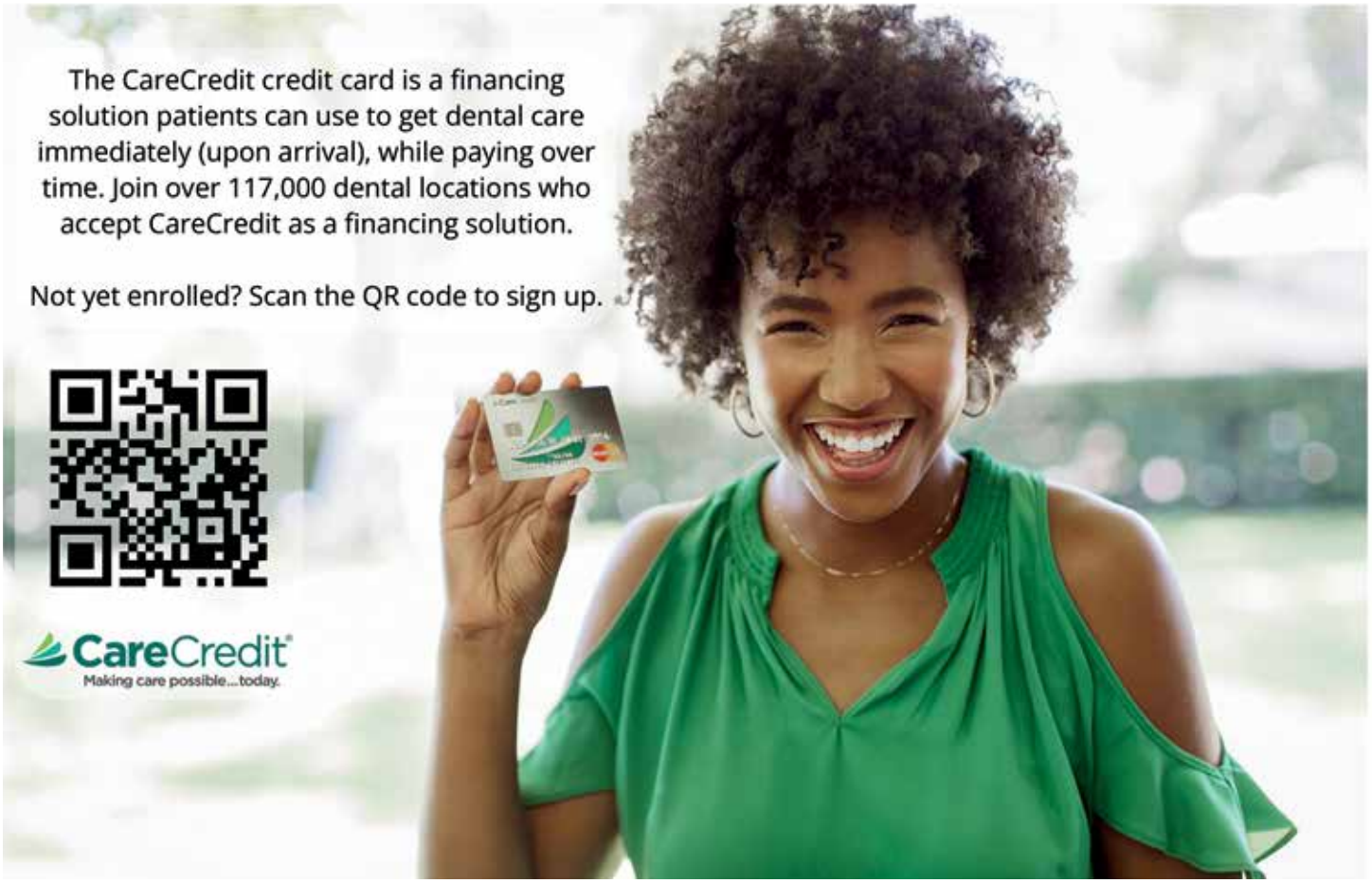

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SEEN&HEARD

Members making news and news for GDA members.

McRae Family Dental Hosts 15th Annual MLK Free Dental Service Day

On January 29, McRae Family Dental hosted its **15th Annual MLK Free Dental Service Day in Athens**, providing more than $65,000 in free dental care to individuals in the community. Patients, many uninsured or facing housing and employment challenges, received cleanings, fillings, or extractions from volunteer providers.

The event also connected attendees with additional support, including medical screenings from Athens Neighborhood Health, prayer and food boxes from Nations Church, and a blood drive hosted by LifeSouth Community Blood Centers. Local partners helped care for volunteers as well, with coffee and biscuits from Dr. Matthew McRae Jr. and lunch from Chick-fil-A.

Through strong community collaboration, the day once again delivered meaningful care and support to Athens-area residents.

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February marked Children's Dental Health Month, a nationwide observance dedicated to promoting the importance of good oral health for children. Throughout the month, dental professionals, healthcare providers, and educators across Georgia hosted educational activities for Pre-K and school-aged children to encourage healthy habits and lifelong smiles.

The **GDA Foundation for Oral Health** kicked off Children's Dental Health Month on February 6 by partnering with Fortis College in Smyrna for Give Kids a Smile Day. Together, volunteers provided local children with free exams, X-rays, cleanings, sealants, and oral hygiene education, helping set kids on the path to brighter, healthier smiles.

Wendy Cardenas visited St. Joseph's Catholic School in Macon, presenting to 3K–Kindergarten students on the importance of oral hygiene. Children listened to a brushing-themed story, shared their own tooth tales, received dental health kits, and even practiced brushing on a friendly dinosaur model. Dental kits were distributed schoolwide—reaching about 280 students—and additional kits were delivered to three other preschools throughout Macon.

Dr. Lily Gilchrist led a Dental Health Day at Primrose Druid Hills in Atlanta, presenting to six classrooms of children ages 2–5. She created interactive sensory stations to teach proper brushing, flossing, and rinsing—complete with "cavity bug" brushing bins, flossing egg cartons, and rinsing activities. The donated kits from the GDA Foundation helped make the event a success and tied in perfectly with the Valentine's Day celebrations that followed.

Dr. Michael Leach visited Northbrook Preschool to teach students about the importance of good oral health and healthy dental habits. Pictured with a giant set of model teeth, he demonstrated the proper way to brush in the morning and at night.

SEEN&HEARD

Members making news and news for GDA members.

CDDS Central District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

Drs. Tyler Lipham and Robert O'Brien at GDA LAW Day 2026

Dr. Claire Meeks presenting to primary school children for Give Kids a Smile

Drs. Claire Meeks and Paulomi Shah with GDA President-Elect Dr. Erik Wells and Dr. Praneetha Kumar at GDA LAW Day 2026

NDDS Northern District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Northern District Dental Society was excited to start the New Year with New Knowledge as they Launched into Learning for 2026. In February, the Greater Hall County Society of the NDDS hosted a CE presentation on Cyber Insurance at Bourbon Brothers in Gainesville. That same month, the NDDS had a strong presence at the GDA Law Day and House of Delegates Meeting in Atlanta. Later in February, the NDDS hosted a full day CE Event including Keynote Speaker Kate Willeford, GDA Representative Michele Amatulli and IT expert TJ Blackmon at City Springs in Dunwoody. During the event, members also received important updates from the GDA President and Executive Director. Throughout the remainder of the year, the NDDS plans to offer many additional CE opportunities which can be found on their website at *www.ndds.org/events*. Mark your calendars and join them for an evening of Southern Grace & Smiles, where Derby Charm Meets the Art of Giving, at the 2026 Gala for Smiles on Saturday, August 22 at Flint Hill in Norcross.

NWDDS Northwestern District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Northwestern District Dental Society has an exciting year of continuing education and collaboration ahead. We look forward to welcoming members on April 24 for our Spring CE & Officer's Visit at the Clarence Brown Conference Center. This program will feature Board-Certified Oral & Maxillofacial Pathologist Dr. Julia Price presenting on pathology updates critical to everyday practice. We are also excited to have Michael Diehl of Bank of America, who will share valuable financial ideas tailored to dental professionals. Dr. Glenn Maron will end the program with an engaging session on facial and dental trauma, offering practical guidance for diagnosis and management.

Looking ahead, our Summer CE will take place July 24 as a virtual webinar, providing accessible learning for members across the district. We will close out the CE for the year with our Fall CE on October 9 at the Marietta Country Club.

Our legislative reception will take place on December 2 at the Clarence Brown Conference Center, providing an important opportunity for members to connect with local leaders and stay engaged in the issues impacting our profession.

We're proud of the momentum in the Northwestern District and look forward to another year of growth and meaningful impact. Want to get involved and help make it happen? We'd love your energy and ideas, reach out to Chris Rautenstrauch, 2026 President, at *nwdds@gadental.org* to volunteer.

SEDDS Southeastern District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Southeastern District Dental Society is kicking off the year with energy and a strong lineup of CE designed to keep our members informed and inspired.

Our Spring CE takes place May 29 from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM at the Brunswick Country Club. It's shaping up to be a full and engaging day. Dr. Theresa Gonzales will walk us through a practical, easy-to-apply overview of the physical examination of the head and neck—always a valuable refresher for everyday practice. We'll also hear from Fortune Law Firm on important legal considerations for dental professionals. To round out the program, Jimmy Siegal will dive into digital workflow processes for complete and immediate partial dentures, highlighting ways technology can simplify and improve patient care.

We'll keep the momentum going with a Summer Virtual CE on July 31, followed by another in-person CE event on October 16.

We're looking forward to a year filled with practical education and continued growth across the district. Interested in volunteering? Reach out to 2026 District President Bryan Benton at *sedds@gadental.org*. We'd love to have you get involved!

SWDDS Southwestern District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The GDA Foundation would like to give a huge thank you to the **The Southwestern District Dental Society** for hosting their annual SWDDS Casino Night in January to benefit the GDA Foundation.

Their generous support helps advance the GDA Foundation's oral health initiatives across the state!

WDDS Western District
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

On February 27, **The Western District Dental Society** hosted a CE event at the Oakfuskee Conservation Center in LaGrange, GA, drawing a strong turnout of engaged members from across the district. We were honored to welcome Corky Willhite, DDS, who delivered a highly practical and inspiring program focused on transitional bonding techniques for opening a patient's VDO. Dr. Willhite shared step-by-step protocols, case selection insights, and material considerations that empower clinicians to confidently manage complex restorative cases. Attendees also gained valuable instruction on building long-lasting cosmetic anterior restorations, with an emphasis on functional durability, esthetics, and predictable outcomes. The combination of evidence-based concepts and real-world application made this course immediately relevant for everyday practice. Beyond the excellent education, the setting provided a relaxed environment for connection and collaboration among colleagues. The Western District is grateful to everyone who attended and helped make this event such a success, and we look forward to continuing to offer high-quality CE opportunities that support clinical excellence and professional growth.

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Dizziness • Vertigo

JAW
Clicking, popping jaw joints
Pain in cheek • Limited opening

NECK
Lack of mobility/stiffness
Neck Pain • Tired/sore muscles
Arm/finger numbness

HEAD PAIN
Forehead • Temples
Migraine-type • Sinus-type

EYES
Pain behind eye • Blood-shot eyes • Sensitive to light

TEETH
Clenching/grinding at night
Looseness & soreness of back teeth

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Inaugural Block Party

GDA's first Block Party was a tremendous success,

bringing together more than 200 GDA members and Dental College of Georgia students at Savannah River Brewing Co. in Augusta, GA, for an afternoon of connection and community. Students had the opportunity to meet GDA members, gain real-world career insight, and build relationships with future colleagues, all in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. With great food, lively conversation, and a vibrant setting, the event quickly became an evening to remember. A special thank-you to Rich, from ATL Bench, whose graffiti-style mural added an interactive and creative touch that attendees enjoyed signing throughout the event.

" Having a strong dental community in Georgia means everything to me. Knowing there's someone I can turn to—whether for academic support, spiritual encouragement, or mentorship as I navigate the challenges of dental school and the transition into professional life—gives me real confidence. With the support of the GDA, I feel I have a true safety net of people who want to see me succeed and who will help me reach my goals."

–Wesley Clark, DCG Class of 2029

LOOKING BACK: Letting Past Fluoridation Discourse Teach Us About the Present

Jon Hoin, GDA Senior Health Policy Manager

Public conversations in the United States in the past few years broadly reflect a long history of local debate related to community water fluoridation. Remembering this history of public discourse on fluoridation contextualizes recent policy decisions, and it provides insight into factors influencing policy beyond the facts. It is not uncommon to forget that the public discourse about fluoridation is as old as the practice itself, and lessons from yesteryear can offer insight into today's conversation. At the end of the day, dentists are trusted experts when it comes to fluoridation thanks to a historic focus on measured, evidence-based, and human centered storytelling.

The Recent Past

Current public narratives about water fluoridation are driven by the events of the last year and a half. The National Toxicology Program (NTP) released a report in 2024 that analyzed studies examining IQ and fluoride exposure. The report concluded that a potential association between high levels of fluoride exposure and IQ may exist; however, the report did not find sufficient evidence to identify a causal relationship.[1,2] The report also indicated a lack of clear evidence for the biological plausibility of a relationship between fluoride exposure and neurocognitive effects.[1] The publication of NTP's report happened concurrently with known fluoride skeptic Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s return to the public spotlight and his subsequent appointment as secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

In 2025, public conversation about fluoride took off. Utah and Florida chose to end community water fluoridation, and the governor of Oklahoma moved to stop recommending fluoride in his state's public water systems.[3–5] Meanwhile Connecticut went the opposite route, codifying the recommended optimal level in state law rather than referring to federal recommendations.[6] Over the summer, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) took a look into fluoride supplements, ultimately choosing to limit rather than ban them.[7,8] One prominently stated reason for the change, that fluoride impacts the gut microbiome, was unusual given that the FDA's own scientific evaluation did not find strong evidence for such an association.[9–11] Secretary Kennedy's Halloween statement on the topic, asserting that the FDA is "driving a stake through the heart of outdated science," echoes rhetorical flourishes from the past that framed ingestible fluoride as part of a predatory public health conspiracy.[9]

> *...dentists are trusted experts when it comes to fluoridation thanks to a historic focus on measured, evidence-based, and human centered storytelling.*

Going in Circles

Public discourse about community water fluoridation has, in many ways, come full circle. Following the success of fluoridation trials in 1945, the most well-known of which took place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Congress went on to hold a series of hearings on the issue in the 1950s.[12,13] By the end of the decade, fluoridation conspiracies would become the stuff of satire, but the shift in discourse over the course of the decade is telling.[12]

Early debate about fluoridation focused primarily on safety and merit. The first fluoridation related hearings of the Delaney Commission, held in 1952, featured a robust conversation about the state of science as it related to fluoride.[12] For local context, Georgia cities, including Decatur, Athens, and Avondale Estates, were all fluoridating their water by 1951.[14,15] H. Trendley Dean (National Institutes of Health), Bruce Forsyth (Assistant Surgeon General and Chief Dental Officer), and John Knutson (Public Health Service) testified favorably about the benefits and state of the research with respect to the safety of fluoridation.[12]

Others advocated a cautious approach to the budding practice. Robert S. Harris, a nutritionist from M.I.T., testified about the multicausal nature of dental decay and concerns about fluoridation's long-term effects.[12] Alfred Taylor discussed his research on fluoridated water consumption and cancer, research that was reviewed prior to the Delaney hearings by experts from the National Cancer Institute and the Public Health Service.[12] Today, the best available evidence shows no association between fluoridation and cancer.[16] Margaret and H.V. Smith, researchers opposing fluoridation since the 1940s, suggested that dental fluorosis could have a psychological impact and that topical applications of fluoride would be preferable.[12]

By 1954, many previous opponents of fluoridation had changed their minds, and a new set of hearings brought new opposition voices to the fore. H.V. Smith publicly retracted his opposition, stating that dental mottling in Arizona likely involved climatic differences, and Taylor did not appear at the subsequent hearing though he would continue to express concern about fluoridation.[12] Instead, personalities like Seattle radiologist Frederick Exner and allergist George Waldbott would lead the opposition.[12]

While both were respected physicians at the time, neither had significant research experience, and both testified using

McCarthyesque premises.[12,17] Exner argued that there were flaws in some of the studies of the time, but he also used inflammatory rhetoric; accusing officials of trying to, "sell a bill of goods;" describing courses at the University of Washington and Michigan as, "indoctrination…in pseudoscience;" calling fluoridation, "totalitarian medicine;" and describing trials at Newburgh and Grand Rapids as a, "flagrant violation of the most sacred laws of God and man."[17] He would also call into question the larger public health apparatus throughout his testimony by suggesting that, "fluoridation is no isolated aberration…you will find the same in the fields of tuberculosis, of cancer, of polio, of mental disease, and even of nutrition."[17]

Waldbott's statement would follow along the same lines.[12] He expressed doubt about the state of the science, suggesting that there is no such thing as a "safe" concentration, but he also suggested that support for fluoridation was rushed through the American Medical Association's House of Delegates.[17] He also said that fluoridation opponents were locked out of "conventional dental publications" and that doctors hesitated to oppose fluoridation lest they jeopardize their standing among their colleagues.[17] While less overtly inflammatory, Waldbott's statement leaned heavily into the notion that fluoridation was an effort fueled primarily by propaganda.

Exner and Waldbott are significant figures in history because they would go on to become leading voices in the antifluoridation movement, and their rhetoric would grow increasingly inflammatory. One reviewer suggested that in the book they coauthored together, *The American Fluoridation Experiment*, the authors, "are able to mix vitriol with antifluoridation propaganda, illustrating with melancholy rigor the inordinate ability of organized emotions and nearly hysterical reactions to ratify ignorance." The book argued among other things that bureaucrats wanted to increase their influence while aluminum, fertilizer, and sugar companies were seeking to increase or preserve profits.[12]

Nothing New Under the Sun

With all of this history in mind, it is helpful to recognize the parallels between the past and present. The FDA's hearing on ingestible fluoride products and even local hearings in Georgia have elicited testimony that draw from a cultural history that casts fluoridation as one spoke of a larger conspiracy to impose bad science on ordinary people for the sake of corporate greed. Recognizing this thread helps to identify ways to address anxieties related to fluoride.

Dentists are among the most trusted individuals when it comes to learning about fluoride in drinking water.[18] As such, all dentists play a key role in helping the public to cut through the noise surrounding fluoridation. To do so, they should remain focused on the facts and real human stories at the heart of the issue.[16]

Last December, a pair of authors in offered some thoughts on lessons to be learned from fluoride's history in JADA:[11]

1. Dentistry and medicine are governed by the premise that the health of people should not be shaped solely by the lottery of their environment.
2. Modern central water systems standardize water by regulating its contents, optimizing fluoride concentrations among other things. Put more poetically, "the richness of natural phenomena invites the scientist to observe and find which of her protean manifestations best suits human health."[11]
3. Inaction comes with a price tag. Consider Choi and Simon's microsimulation projecting $9.8 billion in additional treatment costs and 25.4 million additional carious teeth if the United States were to cease fluoridation.[19]
4. Good public policy is built on the best available science in the service of the common good.

These premises emphasize a framework that centers measured and evidence-based communication that prioritizes people.

Learning More

The Georgia Dental Association (GDA) and others offer resources to help dentists stay up to date on fluoridation.[16,20,21] The ADA updated Fluoridation Facts in 2025 to include commentary on evolving science. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry also provide resources and continuing education opportunities. Scientific inquiry is always an ongoing process, and GDA will continue to strive to keep Georgia dentists up to date on the latest evidence.

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GDA STRONG

2025 IMPACT REPORT

Mission Statement: To create a supportive and connected environment for dentists statewide, equipping them with the resources, education, advocacy, and community needed to thrive and to inspire them to improve lives through accessible high-quality oral healthcare.

Vision Statement: The Georgia Dental Association is the trusted voice advancing the future of dentistry.

A MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

KRISTEN MORGAN
GDA Executive Director

Thank you for your continued membership and support of the Georgia Dental Association. In 2025, GDA remained focused on strengthening the value of membership while advancing dentistry, supporting your practice, and advocating for oral health across Georgia.

A major milestone of the year was the development of our new three-year strategic plan (2026-2028). Built with member input and guided by a shared vision, this plan sharpens our focus on membership value, education, leadership, advocacy, growth, and engagement. It serves as a roadmap for how we will continue to strengthen the profession and ensure our association remains responsive to the evolving needs of dentistry.

Member connection and community remained front and center, with the launch of new benefits including a mentorship program, a front office training program, and the CE Broker platform to track and report continuing education.

This year also demonstrated the power of effective advocacy. Through the leadership of our members and the work of our advocacy team, we secured significant legislative victories, including the passage of a landmark teledentistry bill that went into law in 2026. This achievement reflects more than a decade of sustained work and commitment by the GDA to advance teledentistry policy.

This momentum extended beyond the Capitol and into how we operate as an organization. In September, the Board of Trustees invested in an upgraded platform to support the association and deliver a more seamless user experience for members. As part of this initiative, development of a new website began in the fall and successfully launched in January 2026.

As we look ahead, the GDA remains dedicated to investing in programs, services, and advocacy efforts that create a supportive and connected environment for dentists while advancing the future of dentistry in Georgia. Thank you for being an essential part of our association. We look forward to continuing this work together.

— Kristen

MEMBERSHIP

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

EDUCATION & TRAINING

MEMBER PRODUCTS & SERVICES

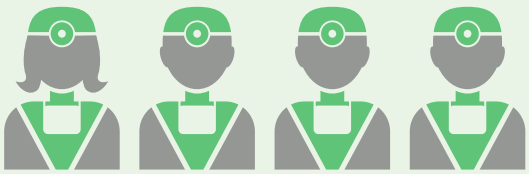
FOUNDATION

Membership

Our members are the heart of our association. We continue to focus on enhancing the value of membership, expanding our reach, and building deeper connections across our professional community.

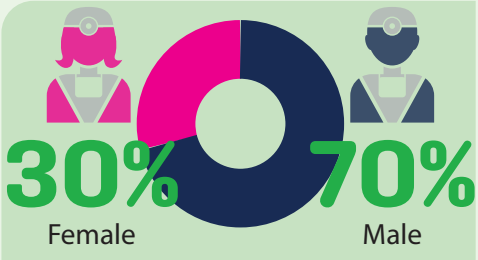
2025 GDA Membership Demographics

3,780
Member Dentists



66%
of total dentists in GA are members

*as of December 2025



Average Age
68yrs

Average Years of GDA Membership
23yrs

State Officer Elections

- At the June 2025 meeting, the House of Delegates elected the following members to serve as officers on the Board of Trustees. Terms began on January 1, 2026.

Dr. Hank Cook
Vice President

Dr. Ryan Vaughn
Secretary/Treasurer

Dr. Rhoda Sword
Editor

Dr. Tom Jagor
Speaker of the House

Board of Trustees Elections

- The House also elected the following District and At-Large Trustees. Terms began on January 1, 2026.

Dr. Noell Craig
Central District Trustee

Dr. Rob McGhee
Northwestern District Trustee

Dr. Hardy Gray
Southwestern District Trustee

Dr. Jay Polk
Western District Trustee

Dr. Bill Bachand
At-Large Trustee

Dr. Heather McGee
At-Large Trustee

Leadership GDA

The Leadership GDA Class of 2025 completed a six-month program featuring interactive workshops, meaningful peer connections, and practical training in sustainable management and organizational leadership. The class celebrated its graduation on October 10, 2025, at the GDA office after a full day of workshops, presentations, and collaborative engagement.

Expanding Value: New Member Benefits

New member benefits introduced in 2025 include a new online community (GDA HUB), a front office training course, financial planning support, and a GDA mentoring program.

Community

Join a network of peers who are here for you on the GDA HUB.

Financial Planning

Thoughtful planning today that supports the retirement you want.

Front Office Training

Let us train your team so you can focus on patients.

Mentorship

Be the mentor you once needed.

The 2025 GDA Annual Convention & Expo was held on Amelia Island, FL, and brought together more than 700 dentists, dental staff, guests, and exhibitors for continuing education, professional networking, and featured speakers in a beachfront setting.

10%
DENTIST ATTENDANCE UP

GDA hosted events across the state to engage existing members and recruit new ones.

2025 Legislative Victories

The 2025 legislative session was a landmark year as Governor Brian Kemp signed several key bills into law, among them GDA's long-advocated Teledentistry Bill.

The GDA was proud to support these efforts to improve access to care and strengthen dental education.

- ☑ **HB 567–Teledentistry:** This bill allows Georgia Licensed Dentists practicing in Georgia to use telehealth systems and methodologies to extend their reach. It creates new opportunities to connect patients with dental homes as well as to allow for consultation, triage, and emergency services. This bill was signed into law by Governor Kemp on Friday May 9, 2025, and went into effect on January 1, 2026.

- ☑ **HB 68–Medicaid Fee Reimbursement Rate Increases and Other Funding:** The GDA secured a 2.5% increase for all 140 dental codes covered by Medicaid and Peachcare for Kids (CHIP).

- ☑ **HB 322–Faculty Licenses for Foreign Trained Dentists:** This bill creates a process for the Dental College of Georgia to hire internationally trained dentists as clinical instructors for the dental college students.

- ☑ **HB 144–Income Tax Credit for Dentist Preceptors:** This bill allows dentists who serve as community-based faculty preceptors to dental students outside of the Dental College of Georgia clinics to earn a $1,000 tax credit for every 160-hour rotation the dentist completes. The program is administered by the statewide Area Health Education Centers office at Augusta University.

- ☑ **SB 68 and 69–Tort Reform Package:** The Governor's tort reform package was designed to help lower the costs of lawsuits by allowing for key procedural reforms such as trial bifurcation, limitations on the use of arguments intended to "anchor" noneconomic damages to arbitrary values, and evidentiary rules to better present the true cost of paying for health care. There is also a provision to limit the amount of third-party litigation funding.

LAW Day 2025 was held in January at the State Capitol.

GDA members made our voice heard at the ADA Dentist and Student Lobby Day in Washington, DC in March.

PR | Marketing | Communications

Public relations and communications activities continue to keep members informed, promote the profession, and encourage all Georgians to find a dentist and visit regularly.

Public Relations

Career Compass Ad

In 2025, digital advertising campaigns promoted careers in dentistry, increasing awareness of workforce opportunities and encouraging students and jobseekers to consider pathways within the profession.

Fluoride Education Ad

Through a targeted fluoride education PR campaign, GDA promoted the safety and benefits of water fluoridation, countered misinformation, and strengthened its role as a trusted, non-partisan oral health resource, resulting in 2.1 million impressions and over 4,800 web page clicks.

Website Enhancements

In 2025, GDA updated and consolidated its content in preparation for the launch of a new website, which went live in January 2026. The redesigned site offers an improved user experience for both members and the public seeking dental care.

180,737 TOTAL WEBSITE VIEWS

29,104 HOME PAGE VIEWS

Digital Marketing Channels

FACEBOOK: **2,926** Followers

LINKEDIN: **2,518** Followers

INSTAGRAM: **1,493** Followers

X: **944** Followers

Launched in September 2025
TIKTOK: **92** Followers

Education & Training

Providing high-quality, accessible continuing education is a core part of our commitment to supporting members throughout their careers. In 2025, we expanded CE offerings with new in-person and online opportunities to address evolving professional needs and regulatory requirements.

Explore upcoming CE at *gadental.org/events-and-ce*

Front Office Training Takes Off

More than 60 practices statewide have already accessed GDA's newest member benefit – an online Front Office Training course designed to strengthen your front office team.

On-Demand Webinars Support License Renewal

GDA's on-demand continuing education webinars provide a convenient way for members to meet license renewal requirements. Courses cover critical topics such as OSHA, HIPAA, LEAP, Infection Control/ Waterline Maintenance, and Radiation Safety, ensuring members have access to the training they need, when they need it.

More than 4,500 CE registrations

- ☑ New front office training (Included with membership)
- ☑ Live and on-demand webinars
- ☑ Phlebotomy training
- ☑ Expanded duties
- ☑ Annual Convention
- ☑ Fall CE Conference
- ☑ Essential Smiles CE Day at Invesco
- ☑ Holiday Head Start CE Day at Augusta University

The Georgia Dental Association is an ADA CERP Recognized Provider.

ADA C·E·R·P® | Continuing Education Recognition Program

Member Product & Services

Georgia Dental Insurance Services (GDIS) unveiled a refreshed brand in 2025 while maintaining the trusted, dedicated customer service our members rely on. Since 1997, GDIS has supported Georgia dentists, their families, and their practices with affordable, comprehensive coverage, and continues to review policies, answer insurance questions, provide competitive quotes, and support dentists at every stage of their careers. Our mission remains unchanged: delivering dependable protection with personalized service.

GDIS Business Insurance Lines

(Hartford)

6.9%
TOTAL PREMIUM GROWTH

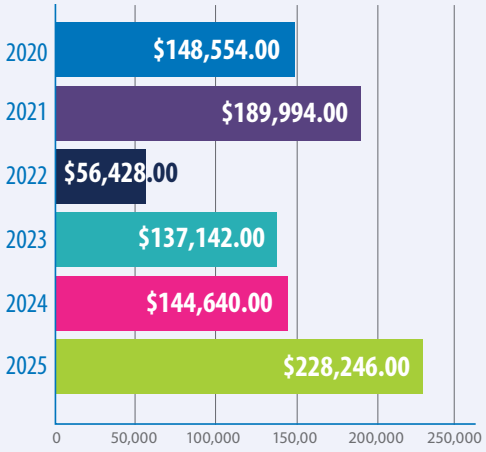
526%
NEW WRITTEN PREMIUM GROWTH

GDA Health Insurance

- In 2025, GDA introduced age banded rates to members.
- We currently have 527 primary insureds.
- The average age on the plan is 49, a decrease from last year.
- We switched back to Anthem as our carrier in 2026.

Profit Sharing

Insurance company profit-sharing supports GDA member programs and is currently performing well, maximizing benefits for members.



GDA Supply Company

(2025)

New offices registered: **102**

Total active users: **293**

Total program members: **1,416**

Total purchases: **$1,089,851**

Provided 200 free waterline test kits to GDA members in association with Solmetex.

GDA foundation FOR ORAL HEALTH

Bringing Smiles Across Georgia:

GDA Foundation's 2025 Impact

In 2025, the GDA Foundation advanced its mission to bring healthy smiles to individuals across Georgia, thanks to the dedication of volunteers, the generosity of donors, and the support of community partners.

BY THE NUMBERS

$189,000	$14,000	200+	1,875
in donated dental care delivered	in preventive care resources provided	volunteers engaged	patients served

Expanding Access to Care

- **Children's Dental Health Month** in February featured a Governor's proclamation and the distribution of more than 10,000 Smile Kits in schools and communities statewide.
- **Give Kids A Smile** events took place at 10 locations across Georgia, providing children with essential, donated dental care.
- The **Share a Smile** program delivered nearly $20,000 in donated care to individuals in need.
- Through **Special Olympics, Special Smiles**, volunteers provided dental screenings and preventive care to athletes at state games in Cartersville, Atlanta, and Valdosta.

Fueling the Mission Through Fundraising

- **Pull for Smiles**, our signature sporting clay event, united supporters from across Georgia for a day of friendly competition and meaningful impact.
- A successful fundraising campaign laid the foundation for the **2026 Mission of Mercy**, expanding our ability to deliver essential dental care to more Georgians in need.
- Generous contributions from **GDA districts**, raised through local events, helped sustain and grow Foundation programs statewide.

Pull for Smiles, an annual GDA Foundation clay shoot fundraiser.

Casino Night, hosted by the Southwestern District raised funds in support of the GDA Foundation.

Looking Ahead

The GDA Foundation's efforts in 2025 highlight the power of collaboration, generosity, and a shared commitment to oral health. With the continued support of members and partners, the Foundation is well-positioned to expand its reach and keep Georgia smiling in the years ahead.

Scan to learn more about the **GDA Foundation** and its programs.

CELEBRATING MEMBERSHIP–GDA

Welcome New Members

January 2026 to mid-March

New Members are classified as dentists joining for the first time since graduating dental school, dentists who have returned to membership after 3+ years away, or dentists who are new to Georgia.

Northern District (NDDS)

Danielle Greene, DDS

Shivane Gupta, DMD

Sara Karlin, DDS

Amanda Kossick, DMD

John Mazzawi, DMD

Northwestern District (NWDDS)

Jason Beck, DDS

Muhammad Chauhan, DMD

Mohamed Ragab, DDS

Southeastern District (SEDDS)

Todd Bjur, DDS

Grace Gavric, DDS

Southwestern District (SWDDS)

Lavendra Shootes, DDS

BridgeWay
PRACTICE TRANSITIONS
& ASSOCIATE PLACEMENT

We are pleased to announce

Drs. Korry & Kameron Tauber have acquired the practice of Drs. Carl & Tammy Russell in Canton, GA

Dr. Rickin Viabhakar has acquired the practice of Dr. Gailya Axam in Decatur, Georgia.

Dr. Andreea Chira acquired the practice of Dr. Zain Dabbas in Grayson, Georgia.

Dr. Hah Neul Choi has acquired the practice of Dr. Jeff Chen & Dr. Vik Bhatia in Johns Creek, GA.

800-516-4640 | www.bridgewaytransitions.com | info@bridgewaytransitions.com

Leadership GDA
Class of 2026

GDA is pleased to announce the Leadership GDA class of 2026.

Leadership GDA is an exceptional leadership training program dedicated to developing member dentists who aspire to lead authentically and elevate their visibility within Georgia's dental community. Participants engage in interactive workshops, network with colleagues, establish sustainable management practices and expand their organizational impact. GDA welcomes two students from the Dental College of Georgia into Leadership GDA.

The program will kick-off:
Friday May 15th
at the GDA Office in Marietta, GA.

To apply for a future Leadership GDA class or nominate a colleague, please visit the GDA website.

Melissa Brown, DDS

Abbey Elson, DMD

Vatsala Jajoo, DMD

Shetal Parikh, DDS

Kristin Piche, DMD

Suvidha Sachdeva, DDS

Kendall Tromp, DMD

Ashlee Turner-Lee, DMD

Oluyemi Workman, DDS

Aliyah Hill
Dental College of GA, Class of 2026

Carter Shelton
Dental College of GA, Class of 2026

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Your Membership Plan Isn't a Tactic. It's Infrastructure.

In 2026, growth isn't about more volume. It's about stability.

DentalHQ helps practices build predictable recurring revenue through automated, fully integrated membership plans – designed for real workflows, real teams, and real scale. Built for dentists. Built to last.

dentalhq.com/partner-gda

See how it works

Making AI Work

8 AI TOOLS

to Help You Create Smarter, Faster Digital Marketing and Social Posts.

1 Canva
canva.com

A comprehensive design platform with editing capabilities.

Why it matters for dental offices:
Easy to learn and create layout, editing and design for social media and print projects.

How it works:
Full control of text, fonts, colors, layers to assist with designing projects from scratch. Considered beginner friendly.

Action Ideas:
- Create social media graphics and posts that meet the current size specifications of multiple different social platforms
- Generate visuals for educational posts, blogs, website resources

2 Midjourney
midjourney.com

Create custom visuals in seconds.

Why it matters for dental offices:
Stock photos can feel generic. Midjourney allows you to create unique, eye-catching visuals tailored to your brand.

How it works:
You type a description (example: "modern dental office, friendly staff, bright lighting"), and it generates custom images.

Action Ideas:
- Create social media graphics for:
  - "Smile of the Month"
  - Teeth whitening promotions
- Generate visuals for blog posts or email newsletters
- Design unique seasonal graphics (Back-to-School, Holidays, etc.)

6 Jasper
jasper.ai

High-quality content with a consistent voice.

Why it matters for dental offices:
Keeps your messaging professional and aligned across all platforms.

How it works:
Learns your tone and generates content tailored to your needs.

Action Ideas:
- Write blog posts like:
  - "5 Signs You Need a Dental Checkup"
  - "Benefits of Professional Whitening"
- Create educational content to build trust with patients
- Develop campaign messaging for new services

7 Fathom
fathom.video

Never take meeting notes again!

Why it matters for dental offices:
Saves time and keeps your team aligned.

How it works:
Records, transcribes, and summarizes meetings automatically.

Action Ideas:
- Capture team meetings and assign follow-ups
- Review patient experience discussions
- Keep everyone aligned on marketing initiatives

for YOUR Dental Practice

3 Microsoft Copilot

copilot.microsoft.com

Your built-in writing and productivity assistant.

Why it matters for dental offices:
Saves time on everyday communication and content creation.

How it works:
Integrated into tools like Word and Outlook to draft, summarize, and organize content.

Action Ideas:
- Draft:
  - Patient emails (recall reminders, follow-ups)
  - Internal team updates
- Turn meeting notes into action items
- Generate blog or newsletter outlines in minutes

4 Copy.ai

copy.ai

Quick, consistent content creation.

Why it matters for dental offices:
Writing content regularly is one of the biggest challenges for practices.

How it works:
Generates marketing copy from short prompts.

Action Ideas:
- Create a monthly content calendar
- Write:
  - Social media captions
  - Google Business posts
  - Promotional emails
- Generate ideas for:
  - "Did you know?" dental tips
  - FAQs for patients

5 Microsoft Designer

designer.microsoft.com

Fast, polished marketing materials—no designer needed. And it has a nicely equipped free level with a standard Microsoft account.

Why it matters for dental offices:
You don't need design experience to create professional-looking content.

How it works:
AI suggests layouts, colors, and graphics based on your input.

Action Ideas:
- Create
  - Facebook and Instagram posts
  - Appointment reminder graphics
  - New patient promotions
  - Patient communications for special events (birthdays, etc)
- Build quick flyers for in-office displays
- Maintain consistent branding across materials
- Design unique seasonal graphics (Back-to-School, Holidays, etc.)

8 Castmagic

castmagic.io

Turn conversations into content.

Why it matters for dental offices:
You already have valuable knowledge—this helps you use it.

How it works:
Transcribes audio and turns it into written content.

Action Ideas:
- Record a quick video or audio explaining
  - A common procedure
  - Patient FAQs
- Turn it into:
  - Blog posts
  - Social media content
  - Email newsletters
- Repurpose one piece of content into multiple formats

Where to Start (for busy practices)

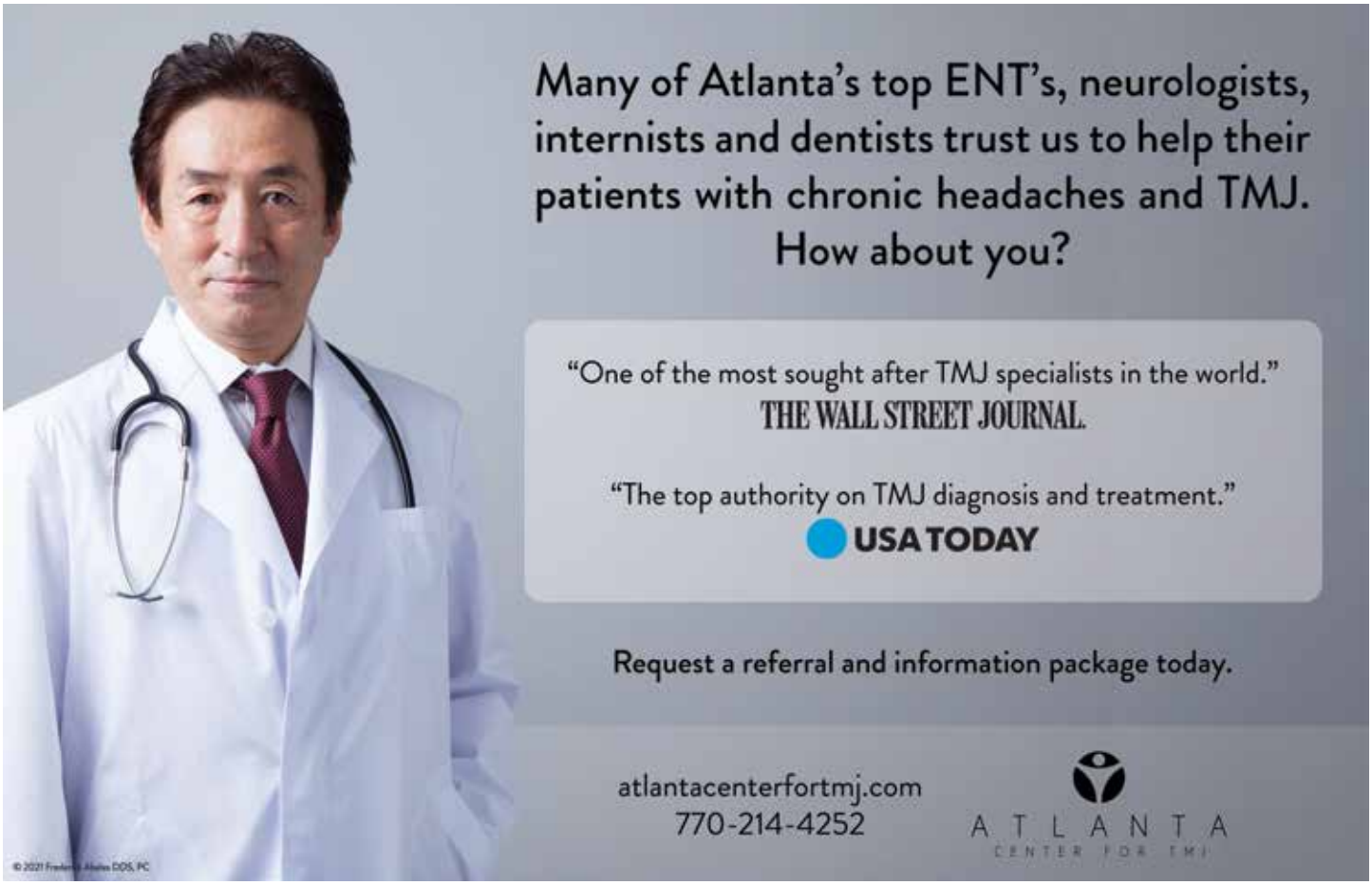
If you do nothing else, start here:
- Use AI to create 1-2 social posts per week
- Build a simple monthly content calendar
- Send one patient email per month
- Share educational content to build trust

Consistency matters more than perfection—and AI makes consistency achievable.

Final Thought

AI won't replace the patient relationships that help define great dental care. But **it can help you stay visible, relevant, and connected to your patients**—without adding hours to your day.

Think of it as an extra set of hands for your marketing—always on, always ready.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Building Financial Confidence:

How GDA, UBS, and Augusta University Are Shaping the Future of Dentistry

Becoming a successful dental professional isn't just about mastering clinical skills—it's also about building a strong foundation for life beyond the classroom. Financial wellness plays a critical role in that journey, and through a collaborative effort led by the Georgia Dental Association (GDA), the Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University is helping to ensure students, residents, faculty, and staff have the tools they need to thrive.

This initiative reflects GDA's ongoing commitment to supporting not only its current members, but also future members and the next generation of dental professionals across Georgia and beyond.

A Program Built Through Partnership

Recognizing the growing financial pressures facing dental students and professionals, GDA played a key role in connecting UBS Financial Services Inc. with the Dental College of Georgia to help bring a comprehensive Financial Wellness Program to campus. By leveraging its long standing relationship with UBS, GDA helped bridge academic and professional resources—creating a program designed to meet dental professionals where they are, at every stage of their careers.

The result is a Financial Wellness Program that goes far beyond basic budgeting tips. It delivers structured education, insightful guidance, and accessible tools tailored to the unique financial challenges facing today's dental community.

Participants can expect:

- **Monthly Educational Webinars**
  Covering essential topics such as student loan management, retirement planning, and long term financial strategies.
- **Access to Licensed Financial Advisors**
  Fully licensed professionals are available to answer questions and provide individualized guidance on a wide range of financial topics.
- **Comprehensive Online Resources**
  A dedicated platform offers educational content, planning tools, and interactive resources designed to build confidence and financial literacy.
- **On Campus Education Opportunities**
  In person sessions complement online learning, ensuring students and faculty have multiple ways to engage.

Official Program Launch on Campus

The program was officially launched on campus in March, when representatives from UBS and GDA visited the Dental College of Georgia to engage directly with students. During the visit, Harris Gignilliat of Trillium Partners at UBS led a financial literacy seminar focused on the real world financial decisions dental students will likely face as they transition into practice.

Following the seminar, the team remained on campus to meet one on one with students, answer questions, and assist with program registration—reinforcing the hands on, relationship driven approach that defines the UBS and GDA partnership.

Why Financial Wellness Matters

Financial stress is one of the most common challenges facing dental professionals, from managing student loan debt early in a career to navigating practice ownership and retirement planning later on. By helping bring this program to life, GDA is reinforcing its commitment to the long term success and well being of the dental profession.

Providing early access to financial education empowers students to make informed decisions, reduce stress, and focus on what matters most—delivering exceptional patient care.

A Legacy of Support for the Dental Community

For more than 20 years, the Trillium Partners team at UBS in Atlanta has proudly supported the Georgia Dental Association and its members. Their work extends well beyond financial planning, including education at GDA events and ongoing guidance for dental professionals as they move through different stages of their careers.

This Financial Wellness Program at Augusta University represents a natural extension of that mission. Together, GDA and UBS are committed to promoting financial education for GDA members, future members, and future dental professionals throughout Georgia and beyond—helping ensure the profession remains strong, confident, and prepared for the future.

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