

# ACTION

January • 2025

Journal of the Georgia Dental Association



**DR. AMBER LAWSON**

156th President  
Georgia Dental Association

# COOL TOOLS

## Elevate Your Coffee Game with the Ember Mug 2!

### Welcome

to the second “Cool Tools,” an Action magazine feature dedicated to showcasing the innovative tech tools that enhance your daily life.

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## 2025 GDA BOT & HOD meeting dates

### BOT MEETINGS:

- ☐ March 7 - 8, 2025 | Macon, GA
- ☐ June 18, 2025 | 8 am, Omni Amelia Island
- ☐ September 5, 2025 | 11 am, GDA Office
- ☐ December 12, 2025 | 11 am, GDA Office

### HOD Meetings:

- ☐ January 31, 2025 | 11 am, The Westin Peachtree Plaza
- ☐ June 18, 2025 | 1 pm, Omni Amelia Island



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January 30, 2025

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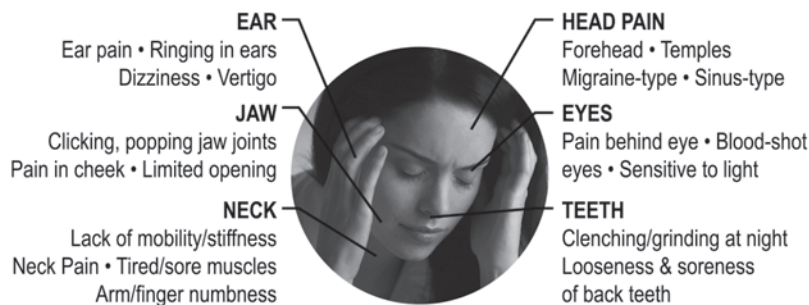


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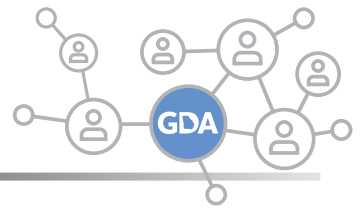
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# 2025 GDA CO

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# Convention & Expo



Chad inspires, motivates, and moves audiences, creating an experience that touches hearts for a lifetime. He is one of the youngest ever to receive the Council of Peers Award for Excellence (CPAE) and to be inducted into the prestigious National Speaker Hall of Fame. In 2001, at the age of 27, Chad's

## INTRODUCING the 2025 GDA Convention & Expo Keynote Speaker: **CHAD HYMAS**

life changed in an instant when a 2,000-pound bale of hay shattered his neck, leaving him a quadriplegic. But Chad's dreams were not paralyzed that day—he became an example of what is possible.

Chad is a best-selling author, president of his own communications company, and recognized world-class wheelchair athlete. In 2003, Chad set a world record by wheeling his chair from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas (513 miles).

Chad's speaking career in the areas of leadership, team building, customer service, and mastering

change has brought him multiple honors. He served as president of the National Speakers Association Utah chapter and is a member of the elite Speakers Roundtable (one of twenty of the world's top speakers).

As a member of the National Speakers Association, Chad travels as many as 300,000 miles a year, captivating and entertaining audiences around the world. He has graced the stage of hundreds of professional and civic organizations, including Wells Fargo, Blue Cross Blue Shield, AT&T, Rainbird, IHC, American Express, Prudential Life, Vast FX, and Merrill Lynch. 🌴



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# CELEBRATING MEMBERSHIP—GDA

## Welcome New Members

October – November 2024

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Dr. Alan Derrick Griffith - EDDS  
Dr. Chanda Darlene Bennett - EDDS  
Dr. David M Pehrson - NDDS  
Dr. Jacqueline Delash - NDDS  
Dr. R Matthew Dunford - NDDS  
Dr. Herpreet Kaur Sethi - NDDS  
Dr. Monica Gupta Sharma - NDDS  
Dr. Thomas P Suitt - NDDS  
Dr. Joseph D Murray Jr - NDDS  
Dr. Paul Yurfest - NDDS  
Dr. Carlos Andres Castro Perdomo - NDDS

Dr. Jeeyoun Park - NDDS  
Dr. William Prior - NDDS  
Dr. Michael L Minyard - NDDS  
Dr. Robert Miles Bell - NDDS  
Dr. Brandon Lynch - NDDS  
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Dr. Tabitha E Efobi - NDDS  
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Dr. Doug Hiser - NWDDS  
Dr. Vincent Michael Lloyd - NWDDS  
Dr. Lorenzo Minniti - NWDDS  
Dr. Debbie Denise Granger - NWDDS  
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Dr. Barry Klein - SEDDS  
Dr. Skyler Brooke Renfroe Simons - SWDDS  
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# SEEN&HEARD



Members making news and news for GDA members.

The Georgia Dental Association (GDA) helped secure over 2,000 dental hygiene kits for communities impacted by Hurricane Helene. Dr. Charles Spicer, a GDA member, and his dental team distributed the kits to those affected in the Eastern District, providing much-needed support in the aftermath of the storm.



GDA Board Member, Dr. Bachand, passed out kits to people in need at his church.



It's Spooky to Be Hungry Event in Harlem, GA



McDuffie County Senior Center



Help from D1 students, Mikayla Morgenroth, Veronica Abdelmasih, & Shellie Xu.

**Thank you** to the GDA community, Atlanta Dental, Henry Schein, and the GDA Dental Supply Company for their generous donations and unwavering support. Your contributions make a meaningful difference, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership.





# SEEN&HEARD

Members making news and news for GDA members.

**The Dental Dash at Dawn 5K** raises funds to support DDD Foundation programs that provide dental treatment to developmentally disabled patients.

**PICTURED L-R:** GDA Staff, Paula Gibsons and Carol Galbreath with Sheri Anderson and Dr. Deidra Rondeno.

Dr. Deidra Rondeno is DDD Foundation Founder and CEO.

Sheri Anderson is DDD Foundation Director of Development.



## Q: What US President signed Medicare and Medicaid into law in 1965?

DCG students participated in Trivia Night at Savannah River Brewing Co. hosted by the GDA Government Affairs team. Teams answered both fun and informative questions about dentistry and health policy, diving deeper into how those impact Georgia dentists. Big thanks to the Dental College of Georgia ASDA for participating!



**A:** Lyndon B. Johnson





**Dr. Jamie Mitchell and Dr. Peter Shatz attended the annual Gala of Georgia Indian Dental Association.** Dr. Mitchell addressed members and guests. His message was how important it is to collectively support organized dentistry. Dr. Shatz echoed the importance of collective strength. It was a fun evening with about 100 guests in attendance.



Dr. & Mrs. Mitchell with Georgia Indian Dental Association's President Dr. Venkat Chalasani and his wife, Gayatri Chalasani



## GEORGIA, Licensure Portability, and the DDH Compact

Jon Hoin, GDA Health Policy Specialist

Starting as early as winter 2025, the Dentist and Dental Hygienist (DDH) Compact will begin accepting applications for interstate practice privileges. Georgia is not a member of the newly operationalizing compact, and DDH's formation provides an opportunity to reflect on the potential value and drawbacks of licensure portability. Without tightening certain provisions, DDH falls short of Georgia's existing licensure standard, and its benefits are likely to be limited at best.

### What is the DDH Compact?

The DDH Compact is an agreement that creates a way for dentists and dental hygienists to practice across state lines. It is an interstate compact, essentially a contract between states.<sup>1</sup> Compacts are enacted when a group of states enact identical legislation, and since they cannot be unilaterally amended, compacts offer a stable solution to long-term problems.<sup>1</sup> The oldest interstate compacts have historically been related to issues like boundary disputes and water rights.<sup>1</sup> Agreements related to licensure portability are relatively new.<sup>1</sup>

DDH currently has 10 participating states (Figure 1): Washington, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and Maine. Pennsylvania and New Jersey have pending legislation.<sup>2</sup>

DDH's agreement lays out a framework for developing an infrastructure to facilitate interstate licensing.<sup>2-4</sup> It creates a Compact Commission, composed of 1 delegate from each state, which administers all aspects of the program. The compact's primary function is to allow providers to obtain compact privileges which authorize them to practice in other participating states. To obtain and exercise a compact privilege, providers must have a license in good standing and meet other qualifying criteria shared by member states.

At their first meeting in August of 2024, the Compact Commission began the work of operationalizing DDH. That work includes developing by-laws, deploying necessary data infrastructure, rulemaking, laying the organization's financial groundwork, and other fundamental tasks necessary to launching a functional organization. If done well, DDH's early work will address and assuage critics' concerns. Critics of DDH raise questions related to cost, differences in clinical exam requirements, and surrendering some regulatory authority to an interstate organization with limited accountability.<sup>6</sup>

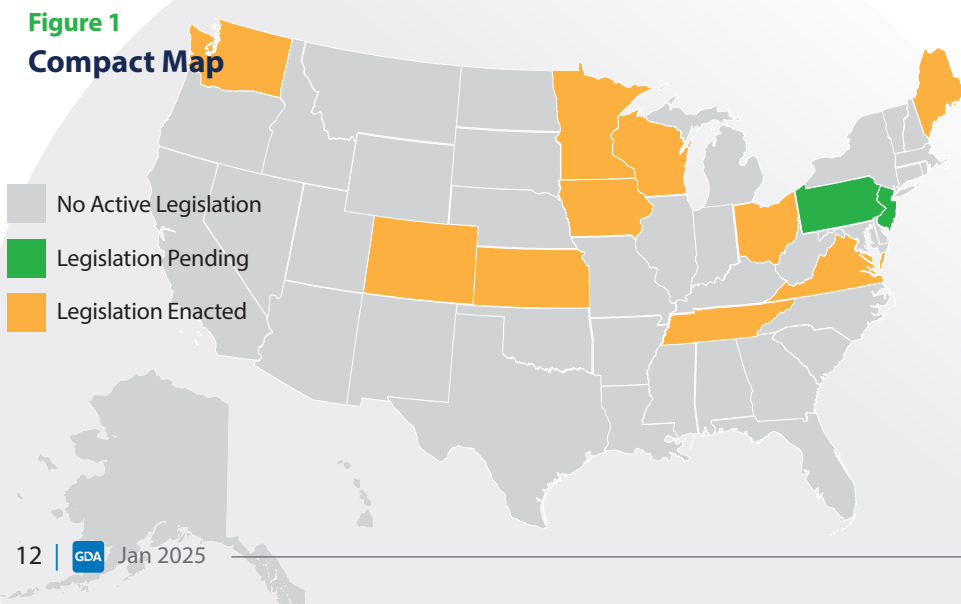
Notably, DDH does not require a hand skills test to access compact privileges, but it does require a clinical exam. The result is that its standard is currently lower than Georgia's. Rulemaking by the Compact

Commission could account for this, and defining the term "clinical assessment" was listed as an initial rulemaking priority at the Commission's meeting.<sup>4</sup> However, critics argue that a standard without a required hand skills test could put dentists in states with higher thresholds at an unfair disadvantage on the path to practicing in their state.<sup>6</sup>

The Commission also heard a presentation on other compacts' financial arrangements at their first meeting. Tools for financing a compact include compact privilege fees, state assessments, and grants. Typically, grants fund startup costs. Privilege fees cover much of the budget once a compact is up and running, but some compacts do require states to supplement their income. Compacts referenced in the financial presentation included occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, counseling, speech pathology, and EMS. Their annual budgets run from \$140,000 to \$460,000.<sup>4</sup>

The Compact Commission's initial meeting did pay special attention to concerns about regulatory authority. Representatives from the Council of State Governments, a group providing administrative support as DDH operationalizes, emphasized statutory limitations on the Compact Commission's rulemaking authority. Legislation required for a state to join DDH reserves the right of states to take adverse action against a person's compact privilege, but only a state that licensed a licensee may take adverse action against a license. States retain the right to enforce their own laws related to the practice of dentistry, and they retain the right to determine limits on the scope of practice. DDH's rulemaking authority is limited to the promulgation of, "reasonable Rules in order to effectively and efficiently implement the purposes and provisions of the Compact."<sup>7</sup> In sum, states surrender a degree of authority related to who may be authorized to work in the state, allowing the Compact to make initial determinations

**Figure 1**  
**Compact Map**





of Compact Privilege, but they do not surrender final authority over who may work in the state.

### Why Licensure Portability?

One commonly cited policy idea for addressing dental workforce challenges is licensure portability. Proponents of licensure portability argue that by smoothing the process of transferring licensure, labor markets can be strengthened, and workforce challenges can be alleviated.<sup>2</sup> The argument goes that compacts facilitate mobility, ease administrative burden, and expand employment opportunities into new markets: In turn, this mobility benefits everyone by freeing the market to do what functioning markets do. Opponents cite concerns about patient safety and quality of care, and for dental boards, there is a particular concern about variation between states in the examination of prospective licensees, especially related to hand skills.<sup>6</sup>

Arguments in favor of interstate licensure for dentists and hygienists typically track with broader ones about interstate licensing in general, but like other healthcare professions, legitimate reasons for licensure demand careful assessment of any proposals that would lower necessary standards. Some professions lend themselves to easy reciprocity between states' licensing boards. It is unlikely that a bad haircut or a poor flower arrangement will lead to a life-threatening or life-altering event.<sup>8</sup> In these kinds of scenarios, differences in state law do not matter all that much, but reducing the number of practicing surgeons with suboptimal skills matters quite a bit to the people being operated on.

### The Current and Future State of Georgia's Dental Workforce

Georgia's current status shows some workforce shortfall and significant distributional challenges. Georgia currently has 5,211 dentists, all specialties, in its workforce, and it has 6,193 hygienists. The math works out to 49 dentists and 58 hygienists per 100,000 people.<sup>9</sup> Density varies by rurality, with as many as 100 dentists per 100,000 people in Fayette County, and 0 per 100,000 people in more than 20 other counties. Over 40 Georgia counties have one dentist or less.

Absolute numbers only provide part of the picture. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) uses economic models to estimate supply and demand for the healthcare workforce. HRSA estimates that the 2024 supply of general dentists in the United States can adequately meet 98% of demand, and they project that in 2036 supply will meet 95% of demand.<sup>10</sup> Georgia's supply is estimated to be 86% of demand, trending positive to 93% by 2036.<sup>10</sup> Georgia's hygienist supply is 73%, moving to 76%. In both cases, HRSA predicts Georgia's workforce will better match local demand even as national supply and demand diverge.<sup>10</sup>

The supplementation of Georgia's dental workforce is, in part, the result of positive net migration. Dentists with under 10 years of experience, those most likely to move, are moving to Georgia more frequently than dentists leave (Table 1).<sup>11</sup> Georgia's net migration of new dentists is 7th in the nation.

**Table 1. Migration Flow of Georgia Dentists by Experience 2019-2022**

Dentist Subset	All Dentists	<10 Years	10+ Years
2019 Count	4,572	1,093	3,479
Remained in State	4,399	980	3,419
Left State	173	113	60
Entered State	290	207	83
2022 Count	4,689	1,187	3,502
Net Migration	117	94	23
Net Migration Percent	2.6%	8.6%	0.7%

SOURCE: ADA Health Policy Institute<sup>11</sup>

### How Could Expanded Licensure Portability Impact Georgia Dentistry?

To assess DDH's potential impact on Georgia dentistry, one must first clarify exactly what compacts, and other interstate licensing laws, actually do. Existing studies provide a poor comparison for dentists. They either look at universal licensing recognition (ULR) for a variety of professions, or they examine health compacts designed for people, such

as nurses and physicians, whose practice, clinical and business, differs from the dental profession.<sup>12-15</sup> Dental practice, particularly for owners, is distinctly local and hands on.

Several findings are still worth consideration. Universal licensing measures broadly do not appear to incentivize movement, but compacts may help determine the destination of those inclined to move.<sup>12,13,15</sup> One study did find a slight uptick in nurse outflows between compact states.<sup>16</sup> Border counties are of particular interest since they are places where interstate practice is enabled by proximity.<sup>12,14,15</sup> ULR/compacts for some professions, specifically nurses, may promote cross-border work. Physicians appear to expand their interstate practice, likely in partnership with large multistate hospital systems, with a compact in place, but physicians in border counties were likely already invested in local cross-border practice before compact formation.<sup>15</sup>

Add to this one final open, and difficult to answer, question: At what point does quality start to slip as licensing standards are eased? The argument between some and no licensing is easy to settle, but parsing out the influence of individual licensing requirements can be methodologically difficult.<sup>17</sup> Several of the studies focused on dentistry have produced mixed or null results when asking what quality enhancement variation in standards brings to patients.<sup>17</sup> Given the limited evidence, DDH may present an opportunity to better study this question as states opt in to membership at different times.

In sum, predicting the impact of Georgia's membership in DDH is difficult. Without being able to observe DDH in action, conjecture is all that remains. Compact membership is unlikely to have a large impact on Georgia's most pressing workforce challenges, particularly as relates to the distribution of providers or the supply of hygienists. DDH may open new business opportunities for dentists involved with larger health care entities. It may also allow dentists to practice in Georgia without the same clinical testing that is currently required. The unknowns currently outweigh the knowns, but Georgia, thanks to its current circumstances, need not rush to seek compact membership. ■

# GDA

## Legislative Insider

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### The 2025 Legislative Session will begin on January 13th, 2025.

This year is the first year of the biennial, meaning any legislation that is not passed by the end of these legislative 40 days will still be active for the 2026 Legislative Session. In the 2025 Legislative Session, the Georgia Dental Association will focus on teledentistry, tort reform, Medicaid reimbursement, and centralized continuing education.

The Georgia Dental Association's Government Relations team has been hard at work creating a plan for the 2025 session to cultivate an environment that will allow us to be successful in our legislative asks and protect best practices. During the 2024 off-season, the Government Relations team at GDA has met with key leaders to ensure that the priorities of our member dentists are heard, and we have set a game plan to ensure a successful legislative session. These key leaders include Chairman Lee Hawkins, Representative John Carson, and policy leaders in the Governor's Office. GDA is working to make sure that all our champions in the legislature are prepared and equipped with data and facts to back up our efforts. Each of our Dental Districts hosted legislative receptions during the off-season where they were joined by their respective legislators, district members, and GDA leadership. These receptions allow our members to spend time with their legislators, forming relationships and providing some insight into our 2025 legislative goals.

After one of the most contentious elections in recent history, the Georgia legislature remains in Republican control. The House Republicans hold a solid majority, 100-80, and the Senate Republicans hold the same margin as last year, 33-23. The House and Senate Majority Leadership will remain the same with Rep. Jon Burns as Speaker of the House and Sen. John F. Kennedy as the Senate President Pro Tempore. With both House and Senate minority leaders retiring, minority caucuses selected new leadership. The Senate elected Sen. Harold Jones II as the Senate Minority Leader, with Sen. Elena Parent remaining the Minority Caucus Chair and Sen. Kim Jackson becoming the Minority Whip. The House Minority Caucus elected Rep. Carolyn Hugley as the House Minority Leader as well as Rep. Tanya Miller to serve as the Minority Caucus Chair, replacing Rep. Billy Mitchell who is still serving in the legislature. Rep. Sam Park will continue to serve as the Minority Whip. 🇺🇸



The Georgia Dental Association will be publishing weekly legislative updates on our website. You will be able to find information on what legislation we are supporting, what legislation we are fighting off, what is happening with state budgets, and everything else happening under the gold dome. VISIT [gadental.org/legislativeinsider](https://gadental.org/legislativeinsider) or SCAN the QR code!



*We are pleased to announce*



Dr. Ronald Durie  
has acquired the practice of  
Dr. Bobby Shirley  
*Marietta, Georgia*

Dr. Ricky Patel  
has acquired the practice of  
Dr. Victor Hudson  
*Powder Springs, Georgia*  
(Pictured left.)

Dr. James Herr  
has acquired the practice of  
Dr. Mouhannad Budeir  
*Cumming, Georgia*

### Practices for Sale

**West of Atlanta:** All FFS practice collecting \$450K per year. 7 ops.

**South Atlanta Suburb:** Collects \$700K in busy shopping center. FFS/PPO patient base. Strong cashflow. 5 ops.

**Atlanta:** Large rooms with windows. 4 ops, room to expand. Mainly FFS. Collects \$500K. Digital with CBCT.

**Gwinnett:** 5 ops with real estate. FFS/PPO. Part-time. Collecting \$325K.

**Chatham Co:** Paperless, CBCT. Mainly FFS. Collects \$600K. Strong hygiene.

**Decatur:** Shell practice. 5 equipped ops, room for more. Growing area. Lots of potential. Motivated seller.

**East of Atlanta:** Grossing \$550K. PPO/FFS. 5 ops. Digital and paperless.

**NW GA Ortho:** Modern practice, 11 chairs. Digital and paperless. Revenue \$1.5M. Mainly FFS.

**Atlanta:** Perio practice could convert to general. Seller will stay on. Paperless with CBCT. 5 ops. Stunning office.

**North Atl Ortho:** Prime location. Large facility. Open parttime. Collects \$500K. Busy road. Lots of potential.

**Gwinnett Pedit Ortho:** Currently a satellite pedit practice, room to add ortho. Excellent condition. Jumpstart.

**Northwest GA:** Recently started, modern practice collecting \$350K. Seller will work part-time. FFS/PPO.

**SE Georgia:** 100% FFS. 6 ops. Lots of windows. Collects \$550K per year.

**Gwinnett Pedit:** Collects \$800K. 8 chairs in 3735 sq/ft. Seller will help transition. Lots of potential for more.

**Troup Co.:** Beautiful, technology driven practice. Collecting \$1M+. 5 ops with room. Real estate for sale.

**Lawrenceville:** Brand new practice! 3 fully equipped ops with room to add more. Digital and paperless. Windows

**N. Atlanta Pedit:** State-of-the-art practice in highly desirable location near elementary school.

**Paulding Co:** Collecting \$1M/year. Moderns. FFS/PPO. 5 ops. Paperless.

**NE GA:** 100% FFS. 5 ops. Standalone building. Collects \$450K. Potential.

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# Forget New Year's Resolutions: Embrace the Power of Daily Renewal



**DR. KAREN TINDALL**  
and  
**DR. LAURA SCHWINDT**

Every day is a  
new chapter in  
the story of our  
lives.

As we navigate this journey, we can choose to lead with purpose, overcome obstacles with resilience, and savor the beauty of the experience.

Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a positive and productive dental office environment. By prioritizing employee well-being and creating a supportive culture, leaders can empower their teams to reach their full potential. Research from the Well-Being Research Centre at the University of Oxford has shown a strong correlation between employee happiness and productivity. A one-point increase in happiness can lead to a 12% increase in productivity. By investing in the well-being of their teams, leaders can reap significant benefits for their practice.

In the demanding field of dentistry, the pursuit of well-being is a rising priority. Stress and burnout rates in the dental profession continue to rise, so prioritizing mental and emotional well-being is becoming an essential component of protecting career longevity, ensuring job satisfaction, and delivering high-quality patient care. The science of well-being is grounded in psychology, neuroscience, and health sciences and offers a holistic approach to the understanding of human well-being beyond the absence of disease.

Using the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, social, and professional dimensions, well-being initiatives make it possible to provide a framework for managing stress, enhancing resilience, and fostering a positive workplace culture. Research consistently demonstrates the detrimental effects of chronic stress on dental professionals, leading to burnout, anxiety, and depression. Conversely, interventions that encourage positive emotions, mindfulness, and social support have been shown to mitigate these negative outcomes.

The provision of support for dental practice teams can include a personalized combination of individual and team coaching, workshops to raise awareness, and in-depth team retreats. For each practice, this looks different, but the results are the same:

**Elevated Energy Levels:** Creating a surge in vitality and mental clarity allows challenges to be tackled with renewed focus and enthusiasm.

**Enhanced Meaning:** Dental teams discover a profound sense of purpose in their work and life, fueling individual strengths and driving the team towards greater fulfillment and legacy.

**Accelerated Success:** Achieving goals with greater efficiency and effectiveness, thereby unlocking the team's full potential and reaching new heights of accomplishment without burnout.

## **Unbreakable Team Cohesion:**

Fostering deeper connections and collaboration within the team leads to increased synergy, productivity, shared success, and a team who functions at an optimal level.

## **What is Daily Renewal and How Can It Benefit My Dental Practice?**

Daily renewal is the practice of intentionally refreshing one's mind, body, and spirit on a daily basis. As dental professionals, we often find ourselves immersed in demanding schedules and high-stress situations. By incorporating daily renewal practices into our lives and those of our teams, we can enhance our overall well-being, improve our job performance, and strengthen our relationships.

Well-being may be regarded by some as a 'soft' topic, but well-being is a genuine science because well-being can be measured and improved. As humans, our experience consists of good and bad days. There is nothing 'soft' about a bad day for the individual who is experiencing it. Science allows us to address total well-being from an evidence-based perspective and measure the results. In a profession that is truly science-based and professionals who are scientifically trained, well-being should be viewed as a critical component of practice success.

When addressing the well-being challenges faced by dental teams, it is essential to utilize science-based strategies that promote positive emotions, mindfulness, and social support. Positive psychology interventions, such as gratitude practices, strengths-based work, and positive feedback, help to cultivate a more resilient and optimistic mindset. Having self-compassion and developing a growth mindset is also crucial for fostering well-being.<sup>2</sup>

## **Practical Tips for Daily Renewal**

To cultivate a fulfilling and meaningful life, it is essential to incorporate daily practices





that promote well-being. Here are a few tips to help you embark on your journey of self-improvement:

- ✓ **Start your day with intention:** Begin each day by setting a clear intention. This could involve setting specific goals, visualizing success, or simply focusing on a positive mindset.
  - ✓ **Practice mindfulness:** Incorporate mindfulness techniques, such as meditation or deep breathing, into your daily routine. Mindfulness can help reduce stress, increase focus, and enhance overall well-being.
  - ✓ **Prioritize self-care:** Make time for activities that nourish your mind, body, and soul. This could include anything from reading a book to taking a relaxing bath or spending time in nature.
  - ✓ **Surround yourself with positivity:** Spend time with people who uplift and inspire you. Positive relationships can have a significant impact on your mental and emotional health.
  - ✓ **Celebrate your small wins:** Acknowledge and appreciate your accomplishments, no matter how small. Recognizing your progress can boost your motivation and keep you moving forward.
- opportunities for growth. Speak up for what you believe in and advocate for your patients. Face your fears and overcome obstacles with resilience.
  - ✓ **Love:** Show compassion and empathy for your patients by treating them with kindness and respect. Build positive relationships with your colleagues and foster a collaborative work environment. Give back to your community by volunteering your time and skills.
  - ✓ **Zest:** Approach your work with enthusiasm and passion. Find joy in what you do and celebrate your successes, both big and small. Maintain high energy levels by prioritizing sleep, nutrition, and exercise.
  - ✓ **Gratitude:** Express appreciation for your patients, colleagues, and opportunities. Practice mindfulness and gratitude to focus on the present moment and appreciate what you have. Give back to others by sharing your blessings.
  - ✓ **Hope:** Maintain a positive outlook for the future and believe in the possibility of positive change. Set goals and work towards them to stay motivated. Surround yourself with positive influences who inspire and uplift you.
  - ✓ **Curiosity:** Ask questions, seek new knowledge, and explore different perspectives. Be open to learning and growth, and view setbacks as opportunities to learn and improve.

## The Power of Virtues

The ancient philosophers understood the importance of cultivating virtues to lead a fulfilling life. Modern psychology has also confirmed the link between virtue and well-being.<sup>3</sup> By embodying virtues such as wisdom, courage, love, and gratitude, we can enhance our overall quality of life.

## Putting Virtues into Action in a Dental Practice

As dental professionals, we have a unique opportunity to apply these virtues in our daily work. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ **Wisdom:** Continuously seek knowledge and stay updated on the latest dental techniques and research. Make informed decisions by considering all options and potential consequences. Seek advice from mentors and colleagues to gain valuable insights.
  - ✓ **Courage:** Step outside your comfort zone by taking on new challenges and
- By embodying these virtues, all members of a dental team can create a more fulfilling and meaningful daily life and overall career. The success lies in implementing small achievable goals using realistic solutions that are backed by science. Radical changes to routine are unlikely to gather the results that people are looking for. A key factor in increasing well-being is consistency in the application of new knowledge and strategies. Small and consistent steps towards the overall well-being goal are the most certain way to ensure success.
- When the well-being of a dental team is prioritized, the effects are wide-reaching, positively impacting the lives of the team's patients. Patients certainly notice and feel the energy and positivity of a dental practice that focuses on well-being.

The ultimate return on a well-being investment is multifaceted. Happy patients recommend the practice to their friends. The referral power of satisfied patients is priceless. The productivity of the practice increases both at an individual team member and practice level. The people within the practice feel energized and empowered, often seeking to further their expertise and learn new skills. Feeling good is infectious, and the desire for total well-being spreads throughout the practice and further into the homes of the team members.

Remember, the journey of self-improvement is a lifelong process. Beginning by embracing the power of daily renewal and cultivating positive habits is a powerful starting point from which you can unlock your full potential and live a life of joy, purpose, and fulfillment. 📖

**AUTHORS' BIO:** **Dr. Karen Tindall** and **Dr. Laura Schwindt** are seasoned dentists and certified life coaches who founded The Mint Door. They believe that true success in your dental practice starts with prioritizing the well-being of the entire team. They partner with dental professionals who understand that a thriving business is built on a foundation of personal and collective wellness.

Through providing customized well-being solutions The Mint Door understands the unique needs of busy dentists and their teams to create a business where everyone feels valued, sported, and energized.

Dr. Tindall and Dr. Schwindt are delivering their innovative in person workshop: ***Maverick Mindset: Break the Burnout Cycle and Soar Above the Ordinary Elevate Your Team's Potential – Take Off to New Heights of Success and Well-being!*** at the 2025 GDA Convention & EXPO.

Contact The Mint Door:  
[themintdoorclub@gmail.com](mailto:themintdoorclub@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Bellet, Clement. "Does Employee Happiness Have an Impact on Productivity?" *SSRN*, 17 October 2019, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3470734](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3470734). Accessed 10 October 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Neale, Palena. "'Serious' Leaders Need Self-Care, Too." *Harvard Business Review*, 22 October 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/10/serious-leaders-need-self-care-too>. Accessed 10 October 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Jurist E, Greenberg D, Pizzifero M, Alaluf R, Perez Sosa M. Virtue, well-being, and mentalized affectivity. *Res Psychother*. 2023 Dec 31; 26(3):710. doi: 10.4081/ripppo.2023.710. PMID: 38189466; PMCID: PMC10849072.

# GDAMEMBERPROFILE

## Praveen Gudipati, DMD, MPH, FAGD



**PRAVEEN GUDIPATI**  
DMD, MPH, FAGD

### What or who inspired you to become a dentist?

I was born and raised in India, and I never visited a dentist there until I entered dental school. As a child, I had always dreamed of becoming a doctor, but I missed out on a medical seat by just one rank. The only option left was dentistry, so I enrolled in dental school. To my surprise, I quickly developed a deep appreciation for dentistry. Just two months into the program, I was offered a place in medical school, but I decided to turn it down. By then, I had already seen the impact that dentistry could have on people's lives, and I knew it was the path I wanted to pursue.

### What surprised you during your first year practicing as a dentist?

In my first year of practicing dentistry, I was surprised by how much of the work involves not only technical skills but also effective communication. It was eye-opening to realize how crucial it is to build trust with patients, understand their concerns, and clearly explain treatment options. Easing their anxiety, especially during complex procedures, became just as important as the clinical work itself. The need to truly listen to each patient and address their individual worries made me appreciate the human aspect of dentistry even more.

This column highlights GDA members talking about their path to dentistry and the value they find in GDA membership. This month we hear from **Dr. Praveen Gudipati**.

**GDA**

### Is there a particular piece of technology that you would consider to be a favorite in your practice? If so, how have these tools been game-changers for you and/or your patients?

One of my favorite pieces of technology in my practice is the intraoral camera. It has been a game-changer for both me and my patients. The ability to capture clear, detailed images of the inside of a patient's mouth allows me to diagnose issues more accurately and efficiently. For patients, seeing the images on a screen helps them better understand their dental health and the need for treatment. This not only improves communication but also builds trust, as patients can visually see what I'm referring to. The intraoral camera has made a significant difference in patient education and has greatly enhanced the overall treatment experience.

### What does GDA membership mean to you?

Being a member of the Georgia Dental Association (GDA) is incredibly valuable to me, both professionally and personally. It offers access to a wide range of resources, including insurance services, continuing education (C.E.), advocacy, and various other programs that support my practice. The GDA also provides





excellent opportunities for networking and collaboration with fellow dental professionals, fostering a strong sense of community and mutual support. Overall, my membership enhances my ability to provide the best possible care for my patients while continuously growing and evolving as a dentist.

### What advice would you give (or have you given) to a dental student?

The best advice I would give to a dental student is to stay curious and embrace lifelong learning. It's important to stay up-to-date and never stop learning. Additionally, developing strong communication skills is just as crucial as honing your technical abilities. Being able to connect with patients, understand their concerns, and clearly explain treatment options is key to building trust and providing excellent care. Lastly, don't be afraid to seek guidance from mentors and peers in GDA. Dentistry can be challenging, but it's also incredibly rewarding. Building a strong support

network will help you navigate both the challenges and triumphs of your career.

### What do you enjoy doing to decompress?

To decompress, I really enjoy walking in the woods. Being surrounded by nature helps me clear my mind and recharge. I also cherish spending quality time with my family. Whether it's a simple meal together or a shared activity, those moments allow me to unwind and strengthen the bonds that keep me grounded. Both nature and family time help me find balance and reset, so I can approach each day with renewed energy.

### If you were on a plane right now, where would you be headed?

If I were on a plane right now, I would be headed to India to visit my parents and friends. It's always refreshing to reconnect with my roots and spend time with loved ones. At the same time, I would love to visit Europe to immerse myself in its rich culture and stunning architecture. The history, art, and unique charm of European

cities have always fascinated me, and I look forward to experiencing them firsthand. Both destinations offer something special, whether it's reconnecting with family or exploring new cultures.

### Without saying "I am a dentist," what would you say if someone asked you what you do for a living?

I work in healthcare, focusing on helping people maintain their smiles and overall oral health. I spend my days diagnosing and treating various dental conditions, ensuring my patients are comfortable, and helping them improve both their dental health and confidence. It's a rewarding job that combines science, artistry, and the opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives.

### About Family!!!

I live in Cumming, with my wife, Anu, and our two daughters, Meghna and Nithya. We enjoy traveling and spending quality time together as a family. Whether it's exploring new places or simply enjoying each other's company at home. 🇮🇳

# EXCLUSIVE **PARTNER PERKS** for GDA Members:

## RECOGNIZING Our Endorsed Partners

**Did you know GDA members enjoy exclusive benefits from all endorsed partners?** Below is a selection of these partners along with their related savings and offerings. Make sure to bookmark this page for easy reference!

In the upcoming issues of *Action*, each endorsed partner will be featured in the spotlight, highlighting the unique advantages they provide. Don't miss the opportunity to maximize membership benefits!

If not a GDA member and interested in learning more about membership benefits, please reach out to our membership team at [membership@gadental.org](mailto:membership@gadental.org).



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CyraCom offers remote language interpretation services that help improve communication with patients who have limited English proficiency. As a member, you'll enjoy significant savings, paying just \$0.81 per minute—nearly 70% off the regular rate of \$2.49 per minute. There are no minimums, setup fees, or monthly subscriptions, and getting started is quick and easy using the devices you already have, such as phones, tablets, or computers.



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DentalHQ is a membership plan that helps dental practices grow by providing predictable, recurring revenue. It reduces reliance on insurance, offering patients easier access to care while boosting retention and case acceptance. With automated payments, practices see 90%+ retention rates and fewer cancellations. It's a great option for patients without traditional insurance, such as retirees or the self-employed, and helps streamline office operations for better patient care.





For this issue, **explore companies** that offer tools designed to streamline and improve the daily operations of your dental practice.



## iCoreExchange

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GDA members receive 35% off the regular monthly price of iCoreExchange, a secure, HIPAA-compliant email service that allows unlimited file attachments, encrypted communications, and easy access to patient records from anywhere. Protect your practice and streamline your workflow with this exclusive discount!



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GDA members get 50% savings on OnPay's full-service payroll, starting at just \$40 + \$6 per person each month. Plus, enjoy the first three months FREE when you switch! OnPay handles tax filings, offers unlimited pay runs, and integrates seamlessly with accounting software, making payroll easy and affordable.



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## 5 REASONS WHY DENTISTS SHOULD Invest in Business Loan Protection Insurance

Business Loan Protection Insurance can be a game-changer for dentists, ensuring that their practice remains resilient and secure even in challenging times. Here's why every dentist should consider this type of insurance:

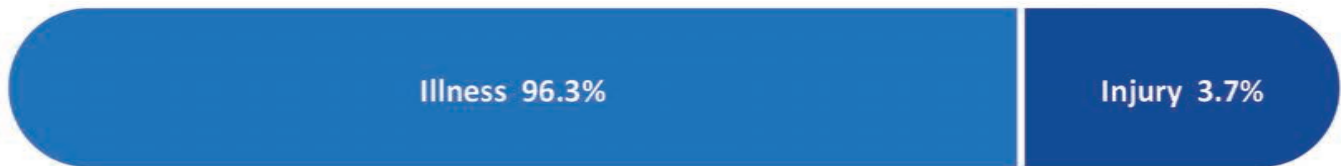
- 1 Mitigating Financial Risks**  
Business Loan Protection Insurance offers a safety net by covering loan repayments in case of unforeseen circumstances such as illness, disability, or even death. This means that if the primary loan borrower is unable to work, the insurance policy will cover the loan payments, protecting the practice from potential financial strain.
- 2 Ensuring Business Continuity**  
Business Loan Protection Insurance helps ensure that loan obligations are met, allowing the practice to continue operating smoothly and avoiding disruptions that could jeopardize its long-term viability.
- 3 Protecting Against Unexpected Health Issues**  
Business Loan Protection Insurance provides financial security by covering loan payments during periods when the dentist is unable to work.
- 4 Safeguarding Your Investment**  
Business Loan Protection Insurance helps maintain the practice's financial stability, preventing the potential need to sell assets or take other drastic measures to meet loan obligations.
- 5 Allows Personal DI policy to Protect the Dentist and Their Family**  
Business Loan Protection Insurance secures the loan, allowing a dentist's personal DI policy to protect themselves and their family.

Business Loan Protection Insurance is a strategic investment that provides peace of mind and financial stability for dentists. By covering loan repayments in times of unforeseen circumstances, this insurance helps ensure that your practice remains resilient and continues to thrive. Protecting your practice today means securing its success for years to come.



It can happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. GDIS can help protect you and your business.

Typically, the reason people can't work is because of illnesses like cancer, rather than injuries.<sup>1</sup>



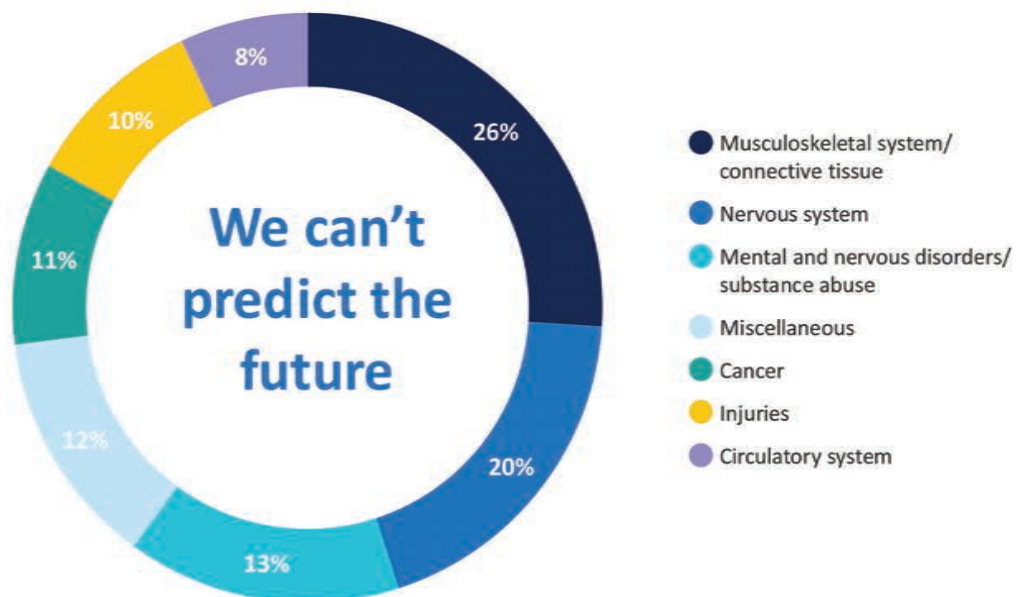
1 in 4 of today's 20-year-olds will become disabled before they retire.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Calculated with data from the "Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program, 2021". U.S. Social Security Administration, Office of Retirement and Disability Policy, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics. Released 10/2022. [www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di\\_asr](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di_asr)

<sup>2</sup> "Disability Benefits" U.S. Social Security Administration, April 2021. <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10029.pdf>. Retrieved 04/2022.

Unexpected illnesses are the **main** cause of disability claims.



Source: Principal Life Disability Income insurance active claims as of December 31, 2021. The pie chart is for illustrative purposes only and is not intended as a complete representation of the circumstances surrounding the claims displayed, an inclusive representation of all claims, or a promise to pay any specific claims.

**diSALESDesk**

# GDA Georgia Dental ASSOCIATION<sup>SM</sup>

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*Opportunities to learn and serve, including GDA's newly launched Leadership GDA program.*

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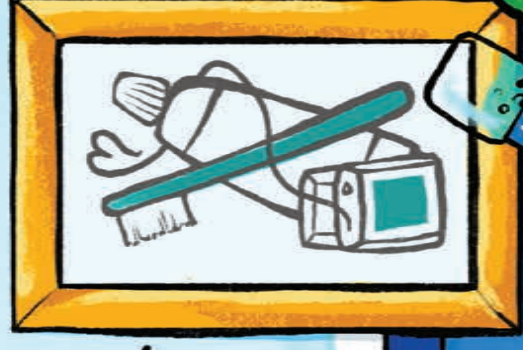
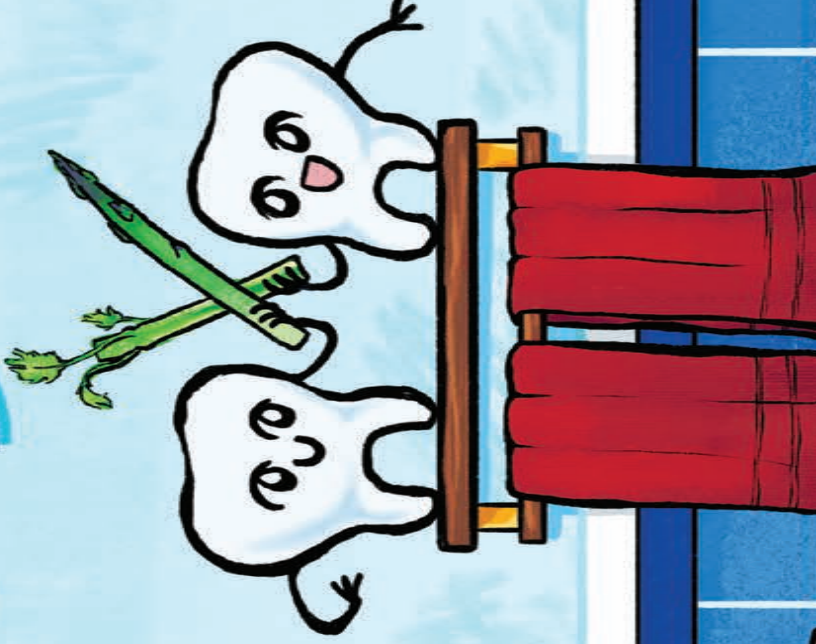


\*Monthly payment amounts vary based on the dues of each district. Info based on 2024 dues rates.





# Healthy Habits for Healthy Smiles!







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February is National Children's Dental Health Month. Visit [ADA.org/NCDHM](https://ada.org/NCDHM) for more activity sheets.

### HEALTHY SMILE TIPS



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- Dental Staff Training
- Efficient Meetings

A portrait of Dr. Amber Lawson, the President of GDA. She is a woman with dark brown hair, smiling, wearing a green jacket and a small hoop earring. The background is a blurred window with a grid pattern.

## **Dr. Amber Lawson**





## Everything that happens in life provides an opportunity.

Take a minute to look back on your own life. How did you get to where you are today? What decisions did you make that got you here? Which ones took you on a detour? Which individuals changed your course? What difficulties did you run into and how did they change you? We all have a story, and I was recently asked to share mine.

Not long ago, I had a new patient who was fifteen years old. She had severe decalcification and decay on the facials of all her maxillary anterior teeth. She was quiet, would not smile and was scared to death. Her mother sat in the corner, propping her elbows on her knees, and tapping her feet. She was staring at me the entire time I worked. That was a bit daunting. When I was finished, she said, "I wish I could have watched you do that when I was in my twenties. I think I would have loved being a dentist. Watching you today was like watching a therapist, a surgeon, and an artist all at once. You calmed my daughter, gained her trust, worked with such precision, and made her smile for the first time in years. You are an artist and a doctor all in one. What made you decide to become a dentist?"

### Path to Dentistry

After I processed her humbling compliments, I told her that when I turned sixteen my parents said I'd have to pay for gas if I wanted to drive. So, my job search began. In my hometown of Montezuma, there were not many options aside from babysitting. However, Daddy happened to be going to get his teeth cleaned. He asked Dr. Carl Williams if he planned to hire summer help. I still remember the outfit I

wore to my very first official job interview! Dr. Williams hired me to pull charts, seat patients, do sterilization, and keep the waiting room clean. I quickly got bored and asked if I could learn to assist. Fortunately, his assistant allowed me to help as much as I wanted. I asked a lot of questions. Dr. Williams explained procedures to me and showed me how he developed relationships with his patients. In rural Georgia, we saw patients from several counties. There were no specialists within forty-five miles, so Dr. Williams did most dental procedures himself. I got to see firsthand how he helped and became a vital part of the community. As a member of Dr. Williams's staff, I attended my first Hinman Dental meeting when I was seventeen. I continued to work after school and the following summer. My path was mapped out and there were roadblocks that popped up, but the goal of becoming a dentist is what kept me motivated to find a way around them.

I graduated high school from Southland Academy in Americus and began Mercer University as a pre-dental student. In February of my freshman year, I donated to the blood drive on campus. That night I started having a pain in my left side. After two months of inconclusive medical visits and scans, I went in for exploratory surgery and came out with a diagnosis of cancer. All the muscles in my left side and abdomen had to be removed. I was diagnosed with Extra-Osseous Ewing's sarcoma by Sloan Kettering and received seventeen rounds of chemotherapy at Egleston at Emory. My inpatient chemotherapy lasted over twelve months, so I had to withdraw from Mercer for a year.

### A Life-Changing Set-Back

The cancer diagnosis when I was only nineteen changed my life. Everything came to a halt. I was given a thirty percent chance of survival. Cancer taught me more in a year than I could have learned in a lifetime. I learned the importance of my health. I

learned that real friends stick around in a crisis. It showed me what is important in life: Money or possessions couldn't heal me. What did heal me was the support of family and friends, along with God's love, healing, and peace. I found that attitude is everything. It's not what happens to us. It is what we do with challenges that determines not only our future, but also our sense of happiness in the present. I also learned what it is like to be a patient! I found out what makes you feel like your needs and health are a priority to the doctor, and unfortunately how it feels when you are just a number. This lesson has been key in the way I treat all my patients. The Golden Rule applies in everything we do!

One of the driving factors that got me through it all was my desire to return to Mercer so I could go to dental school and become a dentist. My oncologist, Dr. Stephen Lauer, told me that when he applied to dental school, he couldn't carve chalk, so he was not accepted. I told him I was so glad he couldn't carve chalk, and that he became an oncologist because he was part of God's plan in saving my life. Immediately after completing my treatment, I returned to Mercer and majored in Communication with minors in Biology and Chemistry.

### The Come Back

I began dental school at the Medical College of Georgia in 2002 and after graduating, completed the General Practice Residency at MCG. I purchased a 47-year-old practice in Macon, Georgia right after residency. The practice had been established by Dr. Tommy McKelvey and later owned by Dr. Pinkney Gilchrist. Dr. Gilchrist was going into an endodontic residency, so he left for school the day I started work. I formed a team to surround me to teach me the things I didn't know. I hired a consultant, an accountant, and an attorney. I bought my insurance through the Georgia Dental Association because they gained my trust when I was in dental school. I have been in

private practice now for seventeen years. It has been a roller coaster of a ride, but I love my patients, and I thank God for blessing me with the most amazing profession.

The practice I purchased shared office space with Dr. Ty Ivey and Dr. Ash Walker. Both were involved in the Central District and the Georgia Dental Association. Dr. Ivy taught me so much about how things that seemed benign could easily have unintended consequences that would affect our ability to practice dentistry. He told me that if I wanted to protect our profession, I would be at the meetings. A couple of months after getting my feet wet, many of the specialists called and took me out to lunch so I quickly got to know dentists in the area. Most of the dentists and specialists attended the Central District meetings. The meetings were a good opportunity to talk to other professionals who were dealing with many of the same challenges. Talking with dentists I met in my district helped me learn how to manage patient expectations and staff issues, and how to make the office run more efficiently.

### Mentor Influence

After several years of practice, Dr. Bill Argo and Dr. Jay Harrington encouraged me to chair the Central District Governmental Affairs Committee. I did not know a single legislator and was very intimidated. With their help, I made it through the first year and learned to communicate effectively with legislators. I found out how important the Contact Dentist Network is in educating our legislators. Legislators make decisions that determine how we practice. Someone must educate them on what our patients need, and unless we take the time to do that, someone else will.

One of my main initiatives this year is to have a contact dentist for every legislator and to strengthen our presence at the Capitol. After chairing the Governmental Affairs committee for six years, Dr. Ben Jernigan asked me to chair the Constitution and Bylaws committee. At the time, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee was tasked with restructuring the GDA governance structure. Going through that two-year process taught me how the GDA operates. I learned how to draft and understand legal documents, a tremendous help in business. I also met members all over the state through the House of Delegates and the Board of Trustees during that process.

In 2016, I had the opportunity to join the American Dental Association delegation as the Central District representative. Dr. Donna Moses and Dr. Annette Rainge mentored me as they introduced me to others in the district and across the nation. They taught me professionalism in debating resolutions on the House floor of the American Dental Association.

My next step in leadership came when Dr. Ed Green and Dr. Jay Phillips approached me about running for treasurer of the GDA. I served as treasurer of my dental school class. I had good business sense with financials in my own business but had no formal training in accounting. Serving as the treasurer of the GDA taught me more about managing my own practice than I could have received from earning an MBA. This organization provides opportunities for dentists to volunteer to protect and improve our profession and grow as a person and business owner. Time invested in the organization helps professionals gain knowledge, friendships, and experience.

### Lessons from Being Involved in GDA

There are two things I have learned in my seventeen years in the GDA. First, if someone had not reached out to me and asked me to go to a meeting or encouraged me to serve on a committee, I may be just like hundreds of other members who just pay the dues most years and never understand the importance of the GDA.

Secondly, I know that if I had not been willing to get out of my comfort zone, I would have missed out on the development of skills as a professional and a leader. I would have missed out on peers to mentor and advise me and the opportunity to develop lifelong friendships.

### A Challenge to our Members

As I assume the role of president, I encourage and challenge each of you to actively engage and get involved in GDA and invite others to join you. There are some really exciting things happening right now. This month we are launching the GDA Hub, an amazing tool to communicate everything that's going on at the GDA. The GDA Hub connects you to members in your district and throughout the state. It provides a platform for engaging in meaningful discussions, attending workshops and sharing resources.

Another initiative is our mentorship program with the Dental College of Georgia. Each of us has been touched by someone who took the time to invest in us. This program helps to pay it forward by pairing several dentists with a group of students who have similar interests. This is something our future colleagues have requested. They want to ask questions and learn from established professionals. This is an excellent opportunity to share experiences with them and possibly find an associate or colleague to join your community.

### Team Work Makes the Dream Work

God has blessed me tremendously. He gave me the best parents possible and spared me for a purpose I am still working to fulfill. He has given me a profession that I love and has blessed me with amazing friends. Looking back, I realize that every detour and every challenge brought me closer to where I am today. Life's unexpected turns led me to mentors, taught me resilience, and prepared me to give back. Now, I am asking you to take that same leap— look back and count your blessings. Think of those who helped you get where you are and thank them for the role they played. Reach out, mentor, encourage and invest in the future of our profession. We are all in this together. Teamwork makes the dream work! 🐾



### DR. AMBER LAWSON

Dr. Amber Lawson was born in Americus, Georgia and grew up in Montezuma. She is the elder of two daughters. "Both of my parents worked and sacrificed to support and encourage my sister and me," she said. "When difficulties came my way, they reminded me of where my strength lies and who it comes from." While not having children of her own, she feels blessed with her niece, Ella Kate, and she has twelve adopted nieces and nephews whom she loves and sees the world through their eyes. She has two English cocker spaniels named Birdie and Cooper that provide unconditional love. Dr. Lawson enjoys hunting, fishing, gardening, traveling and exploring the outdoors.





**NWDDS** Northwestern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

**Dr. Antwan  
Treadway**

Northwestern  
District



## Tell Us About Yourself

Dr. Treadway is a board-certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon from St. Petersburg, Florida, and works in Douglasville, Georgia, with Atlanta Oral and Facial Surgery. He was formerly a full-time faculty at the Medical College of Georgia and has been in private practice for the past 23 years. He is an active member of the Georgia Dental Association, Georgia Dental Society, North Georgia Dental Society, and American and National Dental Associations. He has also followed up his area of interest in anesthesia by being appointed to the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons Committee on Anesthesia and has served as past president of the Georgia Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. He and his wife, Dr. Cassandra Treadway, have two lovely children, Peyton and Pierce, and the family puppy Paddington.



## Organized Dentistry

I believe that organized dentistry is essential for the profession and the practitioner. We are stronger and more effective collectively and we need to recognize our strength and use our voice for the betterment of dentistry and the better care of our patients. Organized dentistry is often taken for granted and given short shrift until there is a crisis on the horizon or challenges face us. We need to be involved and stay involved otherwise we have no basis for advocacy or protest.



## Current Challenges in Dentistry

I think the biggest challenges that we face as a profession have to do with making sure we advocate for and protect our patients. Sometimes, we get concerned about changes in the paradigms of practice and who provides what care. The main thing we have to remember is to put high-quality and education-based skills to work for our patients and keep them at the forefront of our efforts. Different practice models and digital practice aside, we have to be guardians of good care and remain steadfast in the commitment we made to treat and care for people who are in need.



## The Year Ahead

The year ahead will be full of challenges and bumps along the way but if we stay committed and involved I think we will meet any challenges or opportunities head on and become even better for it in 2025. 🍀



**NDDDS** Northern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Dr. Kara Kramer Northern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I am a private practice periodontist in Marietta and Sandy Springs and have been practicing in Georgia for the past 7 years. I am originally from Vancouver, Canada, but I grew up in Sandy Springs, Georgia. I enjoy spending time with my family, Pilates, skeet shooting, walking the beltline, and live music. Music is a big part of my life. I married a musician, and I pride myself on having the best office playlists! Dolly Parton is my hero.



### Organized Dentistry

I got started in organized dentistry to meet other dentists. As a specialist, I enjoy meeting and working with other colleagues. It didn't take me long, though, to realize how important and impactful the work is. Dentistry is a wonderful profession and the activity of associations like the GDA is a big part of that.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

There are many challenges affecting dentistry today. Rising costs, lower reimbursement, decreasing doctor autonomy and changes in our dental education are at the forefront of problems dentists today are facing. If we have a strong organization, then we can more effectively fight legislative battles that threaten our profession.



### The Year Ahead

My goal for this year is to increase the leverage of the GDA with higher membership numbers. If we have the numbers, we can effectively negotiate with companies for better rates and have more pull legislatively. When dentists understand the benefits and potential impact of the GDA, membership is a no-brainer. I will be making a concerted effort to educate dentists in this way. Dentistry is a great profession, and with strong associations, we can keep it that way for future generations. 🇺🇸







**EDDS** Eastern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

**Dr. Daniel Johnson**  
Eastern District



## Tell Us About Yourself

I grew up in Dalton and graduated from the University of Georgia in 2016. My wife and I loved Athens so much that we moved back, and I now practice in the Classic City. My wife, Caroline, and I have been married for 6 years and have a chocolate lab named Ellie. Outside of dentistry I enjoy fly fishing, traveling, and love to spend time in the mountains.



## Organized Dentistry

I joined the GDA right out of dental school and have learned a lot about the value that organized dentistry brings to the profession since serving on the executive committee. This has been an invaluable experience, and I am glad I am getting exposed to it so early in my career.



## Current Challenges in Dentistry

I believe one of the biggest challenges in dentistry today is a lack of participation in organized dentistry among younger dentists. Young dentists get pulled in a lot of directions the first few years after school and I think it is critical to get exposed to organized dentistry as soon as possible. It brings a lot of value to the members and the GDA and ADA are constantly working to better our profession.



## The Year Ahead

I would like to see more involvement at the local level in the next year. I believe if we can get more participation from current members at district events, we will be able to recruit new members and continue to create an even stronger Eastern District. 🍀



**WDDS** Western District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

**Dr. Zach Murphy**  
Western District



## Tell Us About Yourself

I was born and raised in Columbus, GA. I have been married to my wonderful wife, Sarah, for nine years, and together we have two beautiful children, Baylor (3) and Collins (newborn). I attended the University of West Georgia, where I studied Sports Psychology. I received my Doctorate from Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine – Illinois in 2020. Upon graduation, I wanted to move back to my hometown to provide a service to the people within my community. Since then, I have been practicing general dentistry with a focus on cosmetics and dental implants.

In my free time, I enjoy running in half marathons, playing a round of golf, attending concerts, and being outdoors with my family.



## Organized Dentistry

I have been a member of the GDA since I graduated back in 2020. Throughout the years since joining the GDA, I have seen the many benefits that the association has to offer to its members. From continuing education courses to resourceful information to stay informed about our profession. I feel that I can always count on the association to have my best interest in mind.



## Current Challenges in Dentistry

I believe one of the biggest challenges facing dentistry today is the rising cost of dental care and the lack of available coverage for patients. It's one of the most common issues we hear from patients. They need a procedure to improve their dental health, but the out-of-pocket cost becomes a challenge.

One of the largest challenges I see for the GDA is getting the younger generation of dentists involved. The GDA is an important organization for all dentists to get involved in networking and collaboration of best practices.



## The Year Ahead

In the upcoming year, I plan to work towards increasing the number of new members and host more local Continuing Education courses and social events to increase collaboration between members within my district. I believe it is important to provide events that help build camaraderie in order to grow stronger and attract new members to want to join. 🌱





**CDDS** Central District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Dr. Robert O'Brien Central District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I grew up in Douglas, GA, and somehow knew I wanted to be a dentist by the 6th grade. After high school, I served a two-year church mission in Thailand, then finished my undergraduate degree at Valdosta State University in 2009. In 2013, I graduated from MCG/GHSU/GRU (yes, I went through all 3 name changes in my 4 years there), then joined my current practice in Macon, GA. My amazing wife, Angela, and I have been married for 13 years and have 2 little boys - Jace (2) and Aiden (8 months). We actively serve in various positions at our church and are foodies at heart who love to travel and see all the world has to offer. When I'm not busy chasing the boys, I'm an avid Atlanta United fan and attend most home games. I also enjoy working out, 3D printing, planning our next great adventure, and supporting my wife's cosplay addiction.



### Organized Dentistry

I joined ASDA in dental school and then joined the ADA and GDA upon graduation. While at the time, I didn't fully understand what they did for our profession, I felt it important to support those who support us. I've been active in the Central District since graduating, and in 2019, I got poked/prodded/voluntold to be an alternate delegate for the House of Delegates. Next thing I knew, in what had to be a moment of December desperation, the district leaders asked me to go through the chairs, and here I am. As I've gone from alternate delegate to Vice President/President-Elect to on the BOT and now to President, I've seen firsthand just how much the GDA does for its members. Behind the scenes, there are many outside players trying to change the way we practice dentistry, usually in a way that is not in our profession or our patients' best interest. Even if you are not active in a leadership position on the district or state level, your continued membership in GDA does more for you than you will ever know.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

I believe reaching out and getting the younger generation of dentists involved in our local districts is of the utmost importance for the future of our profession. Without strong, active participants at the district level, the strength that organized dentistry has enjoyed will slowly erode. GDA's greatest strength is an active, united profession. District meetings are a great time to meet fellow colleagues, meet face-to-face with any referring dentists, and talk about things that are important to you and your dental career.



### The Year Ahead

For the upcoming year, I would love to strengthen the district through increased meeting attendance and providing more opportunities for our members to interact with each other outside of the office. There are also several key issues going on at the capitol, and we need to make sure our voices are heard. The legislators don't know what they don't know. If someone else has their ear and we don't give our side, then we can't complain when things don't go our way. 🍷



**SEDDS** Southeastern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Dr. Josh White

### Southeastern District



#### Tell Us About Yourself

I am originally from Newnan, GA, and received a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Georgia Southern University. I graduated from the Dental College of Georgia in 2015 and completed a 2 year GPR/AEGD residency before moving to Savannah in 2017. I originally worked as an associate at a general dentistry practice in Pooler before purchasing my current practice in 2021. My wife, Shay, and I have been married for 9 years. She is a UGA and MCG graduate and works as a Physician Assistant specializing in burn and wound care, serving the Savannah community at multiple hospitals in our area. Shay and I love the coastal life and enjoy sailing and boating, traveling, and working on home improvement projects in our free time.



#### Organized Dentistry

Throughout my dental career, I have been fortunate to have strong mentors who instilled the immense value of involvement in organized dentistry. I further realized the benefit through my involvement with ASDA while I was in school. I have been a member of the GDA since 2015, and I have enjoyed becoming more involved and serving as an officer for the Southeastern District over the last 4 years. The support system and professional comradery that the GDA provides has helped shape me into a better dentist and practice owner, and I am grateful for the opportunities it continues to afford me.



#### Current Challenges in Dentistry

I believe that one of the biggest challenges we face, both in the greater dental community and at the level of the GDA, involves the trend of privately owned dental practices being bought by private equity. Should this continue, there will be far more associates working than practice owners, which will alter the current landscape of dentistry. The GDA will need to adapt to engage new dentists, familiarize them with the resources the GDA provides, and promote the value of organized dentistry as an advocate for our profession and the success of all dentists and practice models.



#### The Year Ahead

The Southeastern District is large and encompasses three main areas within Georgia: Savannah, Statesboro, and Brunswick. While we have strong participation in the Savannah area, I hope to expand our membership by engaging with dentists throughout the entire district. To accomplish this, I hope to offer meetings and CE in all three cities over the course of the year to make participation more accessible to everyone in our district and enhance the overall member experience. 🌱





**SWDDS** Southwestern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Dr. Carolyn Allen Southwestern District

“Organized dentistry plays a crucial role in advancing the profession and improving patient care through advocacy, professional development, support, mentorship, and public awareness.”



### Tell Us About Yourself

I am a dentist at North Valdosta Dental Care in Valdosta, GA, where I was born and raised. My journey in dentistry began at the age of 16 when I started as a dental assistant, and I quickly developed a passion for the field. I earned my undergraduate degree from Valdosta State University, where I married my husband, Garrett, a CPA who also works in Valdosta. I then pursued my dental degree at the University of Florida College of Dentistry, graduating in 2017. Together, we have three wonderful children: Bryce (6), Wyatt (4), and Carlie Beth (2).



### Organized Dentistry

During my time at Valdosta State University, I was an active member of the American Student Dental Association. After graduating from the University of Florida College of Dentistry, I practiced in Florida for six years, where I joined the Florida Dental Association, Alachua County Dental Association, and Marion County Dental Association. Since graduating in 2017, I have maintained my membership with the American Dental Association. In 2022, I began advancing through the chairs of the Southwestern District Dental Association. I have also served as a Delegate for the Georgia Dental Association, and currently, I am on the board of trustees as president-elect for my district. Organized dentistry plays a crucial role in advancing the profession and improving patient care through advocacy, professional development, support, mentorship, and public awareness.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

A key challenge we face is encouraging younger dentists to engage actively in organized dentistry. Their participation is vital for the future of our profession, ensuring that we continue to advocate for our collective interests. It's essential that we highlight the value of organized dentistry to younger professionals and demonstrate how it can support their practices and careers.



### The Year Ahead

As president, I aim to enhance attendance at our district events by offering exceptional continuing education opportunities that appeal to both dentists and team members. Strengthening relationships and fostering connections within our community will be key as we highlight the value of the GDA and leadership in dentistry. I want more of our colleagues to come to these events, allowing them to experience the camaraderie our association embodies. Additionally, I will focus on actively involving newer graduates in the Southwestern District, underscoring the importance of membership for our collective growth and success. 🌱



Malpractice



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Auto



Business &  
Workers' Compensation



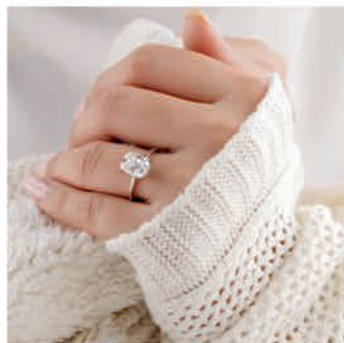
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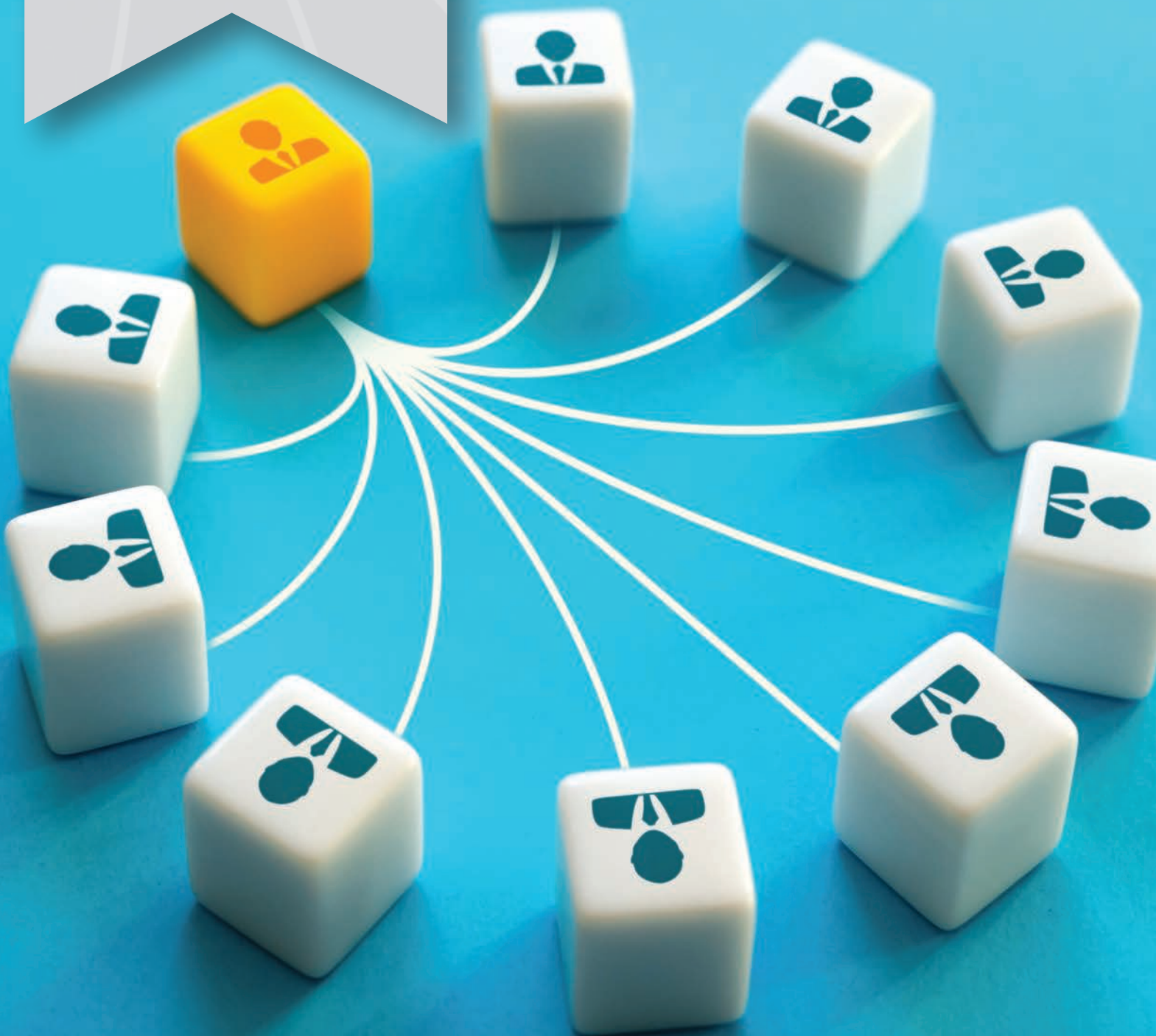
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**2025**  
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GDA 2025 Committees, Councils, & Task Force.



## GDA DISTRICT MAP AND COUNTY LIST

### District Dental Societies

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Barrow, Clayton, Dekalb, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Morgan, Newton, Rockdale, and Walton.

#### NORTHWESTERN ■

Bartow, Carroll, Catoosa, Chatooga, Cherokee, Cobb, Dade, Dawson, Douglas, Fannin, Floyd, Forsyth, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield.

#### EASTERN ■

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#### CENTRAL ■

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#### WESTERN ■

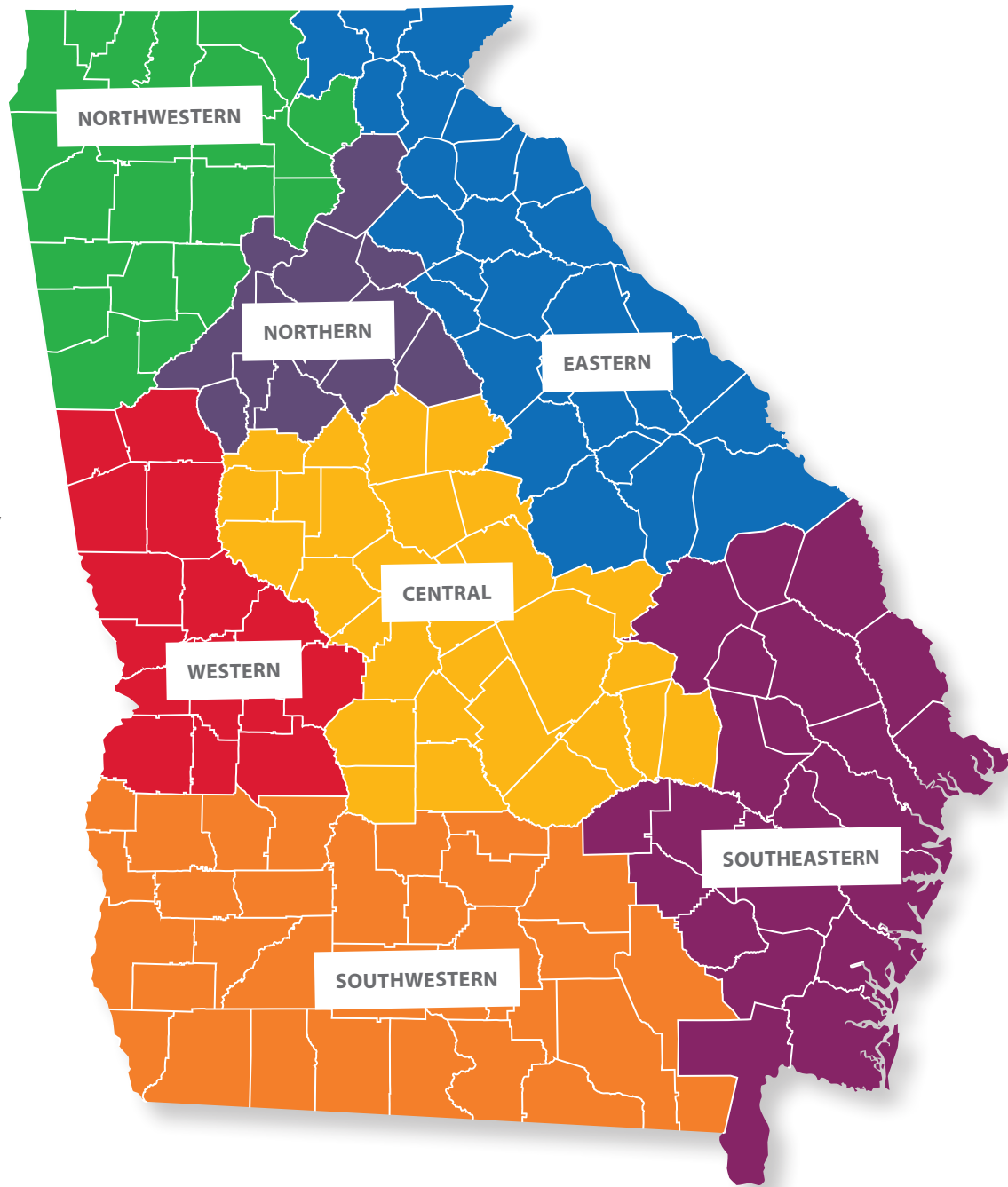
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# REVOLUTIONIZING DENTAL CARE with the Autism Reality Experience (ARE)

The GDA was proud to introduce Second Wind Dreams and the Autism Reality Experience (ARE) to our members at the 2024 Fall Continuing Education Conference in Peachtree City. Their hands-on reality experience and discussion/debrief led by Melora Williams, MS, CMHT, CDP, DCCS gave everyone a real-life insight into what autistic patients may experience in your practice and how to create a more supportive atmosphere. They have graciously penned this article to provide some tips on how to rethink dental care for your neurodivergent patients. We plan to bring the ARE to the 2025 Annual Convention and Expo, and we hope you'll check it out.

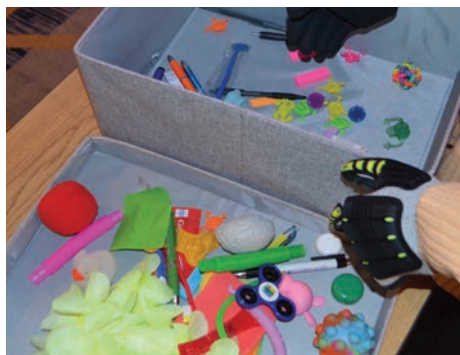
— **EMILY JACKSON** Director of Continuing Education and Training

## The Autism Reality Experience (ARE) is transforming how dental professionals approach care

for neurodivergent patients, particularly those with sensory sensitivities. While originally developed to simulate the challenges faced by individuals with autism, ARE provides insights that are equally valuable for addressing sensory processing difficulties. By fostering a deeper understanding of these challenges, ARE equips dental teams to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all patients.

One of the most exciting developments tied to ARE is the opportunity for dental practices to enhance their services through thoughtful tools and strategies, including sensory-friendly solutions like Neuro-Sensory Bags. These bags, available exclusively through Second Wind Dreams,

offer a seamless way for dental practices to support neurodivergent patients while maintaining a professional and inclusive approach to care.



## Rethinking Dental Care for Neurodivergent Patients

### 1. Developing Empathy for Sensory Needs

Empathy is the foundation of patient-centered care, and the Autism Reality Experience is designed to foster this essential quality. By immersing participants in the sensory and communication challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, ARE helps dental professionals understand the underlying causes of patient behaviors like restlessness, fear, or resistance.

This experience encourages dental teams to reframe these behaviors as natural responses to overwhelming stimuli, rather than as defiance. This shift in perspective can lead to more compassionate, patient-focused care, creating a sense of trust and understanding that benefits both patients and their providers.

### 2. Creating Sensory-Friendly Environments

ARE emphasizes the importance of tailoring dental environments to meet the needs of neurodivergent patients. While each practice will need to evaluate its specific setting, there are many ways to reduce sensory

triggers and make patients feel more comfortable. Suggestions include:

- **Adjusting Lighting:** Exploring options like dimmable lights to reduce visual overstimulation.
- **Reducing Noise:** Creating quieter treatment spaces or offering ways to minimize disruptive sounds.
- **Promoting Comfort:** Providing calming elements to help patients self-regulate during procedures.

These adjustments could be part of a larger strategy to create a more welcoming and inclusive space for all patients, helping practices stand out as leaders in sensory-friendly care.

### 3. Enhancing Communication

Clear communication is critical for ensuring positive dental experiences, especially for neurodivergent patients. ARE highlights strategies for adapting communication styles, including:

- Using visual aids to explain procedures in simple, easy-to-understand steps.
- Offering pre-appointment introductions to help patients become familiar with the office.
- Simplifying language and using non-verbal cues to support understanding.

These techniques could help patients feel more in control during appointments, reducing anxiety and building trust with their dental team.

## Empowering Dental Practices with Neuro-Sensory Bags

Second Wind Dreams is proud to offer Neuro-Sensory Bags as part of its commitment to supporting neurodivergent individuals. These bags are specifically designed to enhance the dental experience by addressing sensory challenges and promoting patient comfort.

When practices invest in Neuro-Sensory Bags, they gain access to a professionally curated resource that:





**1. Demonstrates a Commitment to Inclusivity:** Offering these bags signals that a practice values the needs of all patients, fostering goodwill and trust within the community.

**2. Supports Positive Patient Experiences:** Neuro-Sensory Bags help patients feel more secure and at ease during appointments, reducing anxiety and promoting cooperation.

**3. Increases Practice Marketability:** By incorporating sensory-friendly solutions, dental practices can attract a broader range of patients and differentiate themselves as leaders in compassionate care.

Second Wind Dreams provides these bags as part of a comprehensive approach to sensory-friendly care, ensuring practices have access to tools that are both effective and professionally packaged.

## Suggesting a Certification Program in Neuro-Sensory Dental Care

To further enhance dental practices' ability to meet the needs of neurodivergent patients, Second Wind Dreams is also introducing a Dental Practice Certification in Neuro-Sensory Care. This program empowers dental teams with the training and resources needed to provide inclusive, patient-centered services.

The certification process will include:

**1. Participation in the Autism Reality Experience (ARE):** A hands-on simulation that deepens understanding of sensory challenges.

**2. Sensory-Friendly Training:** Guidance on making environmental and procedural modifications to support neurodivergent patients.

**3. Integration of Neuro-Sensory Bags:** Practices would be encouraged to use these bags as part of their care strategy, benefiting both patients and their families.

By pursuing this certification, dental teams can position themselves as leaders in neurodivergent-friendly care, demonstrating their commitment to addressing a critical gap in healthcare accessibility.

## Long-Term Benefits for Practices and Patients

Focusing on sensory-friendly care could yield significant benefits for dental practices and their patients, including:

- **Improved Patient Outcomes:** Neurodivergent patients who feel supported and understood are more likely to complete treatments and maintain regular visits.
- **Increased Patient Loyalty:** Families seeking sensory-friendly care are likely to return to practices that prioritize their needs.
- **Enhanced Professional Fulfillment:** Dental teams equipped to address diverse needs may experience greater confidence and satisfaction in their work.

By adopting the insights and tools provided through ARE and Neuro-Sensory Bags, practices can help close the gap in oral healthcare for neurodivergent individuals,

improving their overall health and quality of life.

## Conclusion

The Autism Reality Experience is revolutionizing how dental professionals approach neurodivergent care, offering practical solutions to improve patient experiences. Through immersive training and resources like Neuro-Sensory Bags, ARE empowers dental teams to create inclusive environments where all patients feel supported and valued.

By integrating sensory-friendly strategies and pursuing certifications in neuro-sensory care, dental practices can lead the way in addressing a critical healthcare need. As awareness of neurodiversity grows, tools like ARE and Neuro-Sensory Bags will play an increasingly vital role in ensuring that every patient receives the care they deserve.

For dental professionals, embracing these resources is not only an investment in their practice but also a meaningful step toward creating a more inclusive and compassionate future for healthcare. 🇺🇸



**About Second Wind Dreams:** Second Wind Dreams®, founded in 1997 and headquartered in Roswell, GA, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the perception of aging through the fulfillment of dreams and innovative educational programs. Our globally recognized Virtual Dementia Tour® provides a powerful, immersive experience that fosters understanding and empathy for individuals living with dementia. Additionally, the Autism Reality Experience (ARE) helps participants gain insight into the challenges of neurodivergent people. To learn more or get involved, visit [www.secondwind.org](http://www.secondwind.org)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about the sensory bags, please contact [anita@secondwind.org](mailto:anita@secondwind.org). We are launching the Certification classes in February which is when we will have the bags available.





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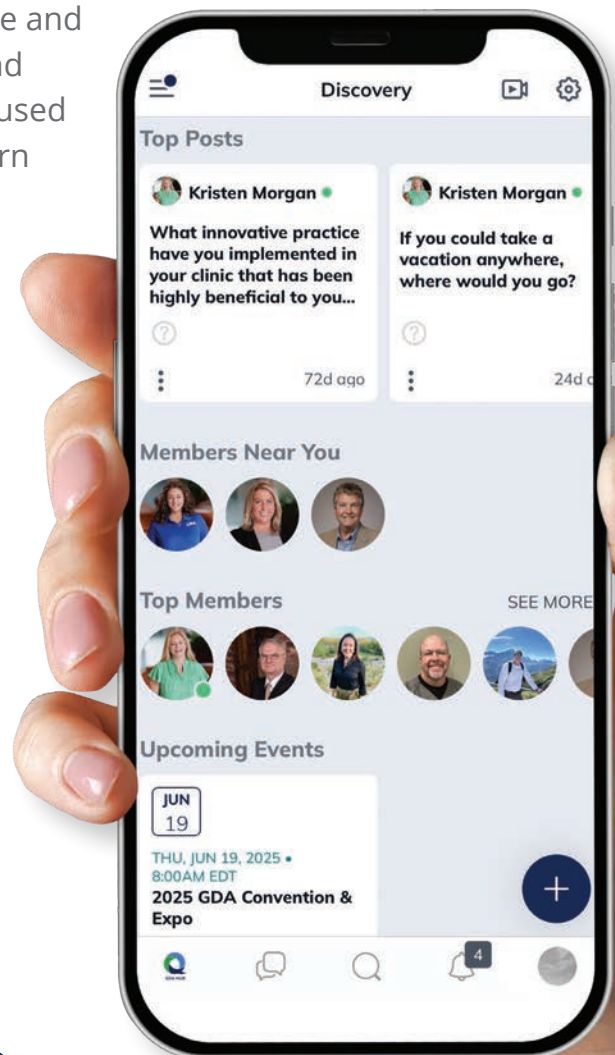
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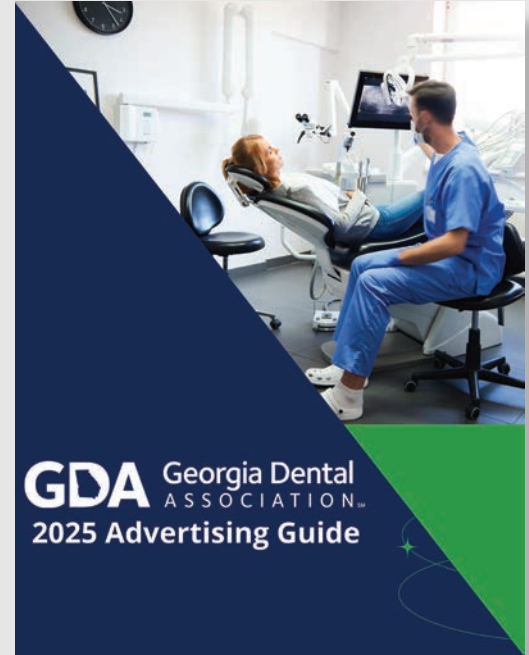
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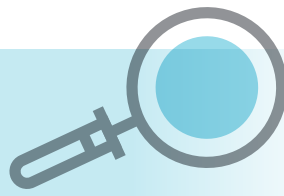
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drpaulen@mylar.llc or text 404-966-1298 for additional information. My CV is available upon request. For a job outside Metro Atlanta, travel expenses and accommodation may be required.

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