

# ACTION

January • 2026

Journal of the Georgia Dental Association

**DR. PETER SHATZ**

157th President  
Georgia Dental Association

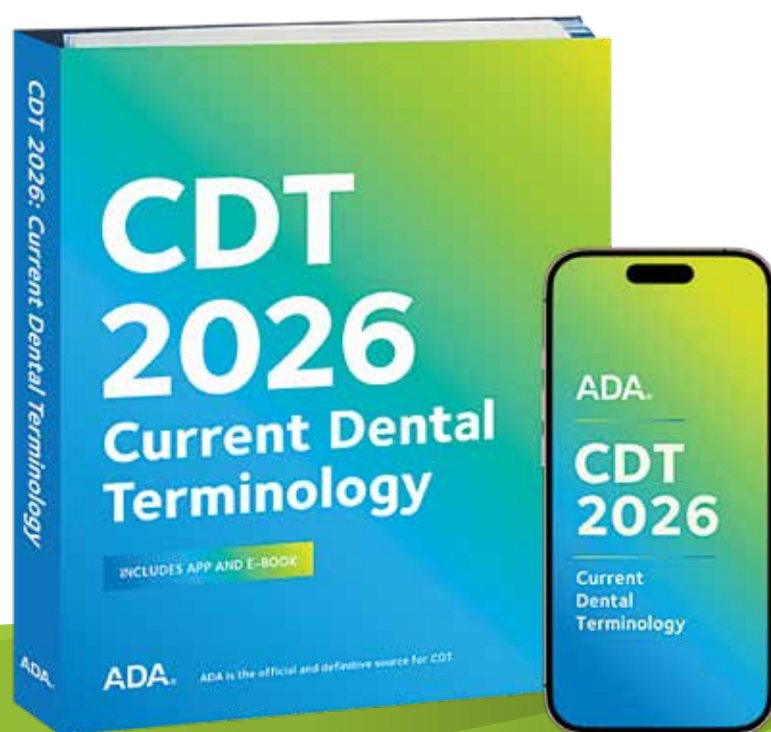
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**DR. RHODA J. SWORD**  
GDA Editor

## Happy New Year, GDA MEMBERS!!!

At the GDA, we begin each year with new leaders, including a new President, President Elect, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, Speaker of the House, Editor and Board of Trustees. We moved to a calendar year, meaning January 1 starts new leadership for the GDA each year! I can confidently say we have been in great hands, and we are going to be in great hands moving forward in the Georgia Dental Association! Look in our leadership directories in this journal! If you don't know who your leaders are in your district, LOOK THEM UP! Reach out to them! Go to your next DISTRICT MEETING!! Show up!

While we are talking about connecting, do one New Year's challenge for me concerning the GDA! **Join the HUB!!** Here is the QR code. You can join it on your computer, or on your phone. For your phone, you will use the "MIGHTY" app, and it will



**mighty**

# Time, Connection, and the *Power* of Dentistry

go to the HUB! Go to your District's Page! Look at the upcoming events! Look at the conversations. Start your own on the main page! We want this to be interactive and a safe place to ask questions and get answers.

Because it is the new year, in many of our offices, patients are reaching out to schedule the dental treatment that they may have been putting off since last year, your front desk team is verifying everyone's new benefits, and dental office life is buzzing around you. While all of that is business as usual, what are you doing for you? For the hard-working dentist who carries everyone's cares on their shoulders (and PPE)! HA! What will you do for yourself this year? How will you give yourself the biggest gift anyone can give? TIME!

I have noticed a phenomenon that I have not named, but it is the well-meaning futuristic scheduling of an event, a lunch with a friend, a vacation, a trip to the zoo with your children, grandchildren? How many times do you chat with a friend ending with, "we should have lunch" or "we should grab coffee sometime" but we never do it. I personally know that if I do not open my phone calendar that minute and start rattling off dates, like "what about February 7th at noon?" we could absolutely go years saying, "we should get together sometime..." I have often done that, and for some of those, we have still never connected. What if this year is the year of connections for you? Intentional connections and intentional selfcare time added to your calendar!

Gone are the days where "never taking a day off of work" is a badge of honor! We can work hard, and we can take time off to pursue experiences that fill our souls, be it

travel, or time with family, or even much needed time alone!

Henry David Thoreau wrote in his book *Walden*, "If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." This is often shortened and refocused to say, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined." What would that look like for you this year?! I think many of you need a trip or even just a break! Respect and love and care for yourself, enough to make it happen!

While you are planning your year, block off July 2-4 for the GDA meeting this summer. Make it a beautiful trip with your family, your team, or just yourself, with a big fireworks display at the end! Connecting with other dentists brings a joy and camaraderie that far exceeds getting the required CE hours. Try reaching out to a few classmates or friends and plan to all attend together! The venue and hotels are already set up. If you like cornhole, there is a cornhole tournament, and plenty of beach for everyone (and some CE)!

I am constantly inspired by CS Lewis and his writings. He reminds us, thankfully, that "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." – C.S. Lewis

What will that look like for you this year? I am confident with a little encouragement; we can each tap into our creative and brilliant sides to achieve a fun goal this year. Maybe it is to be more involved in the GDA! Attend that district meeting that you have been putting off for a few years. Each district now has a Spring meeting that contains CE and



amazing colleagues in your very own back yard. Because you have so much in common, there will be no lack of table talk and connection! Maybe you are going through a tough and frustrating time in your practice and just need a listening ear. For that, I am always here, and so are your fellow dentists. We have one of the most supportive professions. If we as colleagues cannot help you talk through your challenges to come up with some solutions and paths forward, we can find someone who can! No challenge is too

large to conquer with support, and no situation has to be faced alone! Dentists and the GDA are here for each other!!

The Districts and the GDA also need to hear your voice and your ideas. We are truly stronger together and represent all dentists in all forms of practice. The GDA is also made up of many dentists in specialty practice and it benefits from all of these voices in dentistry coming together to advocate for dentistry, our profession and our patients! What a network created for you, especially for

the new dentists who may be in your first few years of practice! Ask a dentist who has been in practice a bit how they handle certain office situations. They will be overjoyed to talk with you about what has worked and has not worked for them. Tap into that resource!!

What will you dream of this year? Dream big and show up and make it a truly incredible year in this amazing profession! I cannot wait to hear the stories. The sky is the limit! 🇺🇸

*Take care,* 🌿 Dr. Rhoda J. Sword



# Save the Dates

**May 8**

**GDAPAC Golf Tournament**

Callaway Gardens  
— Pine Mountain,  
GA



**September 18-19**

**Fall CE Conference**

Sonesta Atlanta  
— Northwest Galleria  
Atlanta, GA



**October 24**

**Pull for Smiles**

Fieldstone Hunting Preserve  
— Dry Branch,  
GA



**More information coming soon!**



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**Registration is Open!**

**DON'T WAIT**—secure your spot early to take advantage of Save Your Seat pricing and secure your hotel accommodations early. This will be the lowest price offered with GDA Member rates starting at \$599.

**Save Your Seat Pricing ends February 25th.**

Make it a memorable family getaway over the 4th of July Holiday. Enjoy a week of professional development, networking and relaxation on the beach, finishing the weekend with a free fireworks show!

***We look forward to seeing you there!***

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# nvention & Expo



## INTRODUCING the 2026 GDA Convention & Expo Keynote Speaker: **CARLIN ISLES**

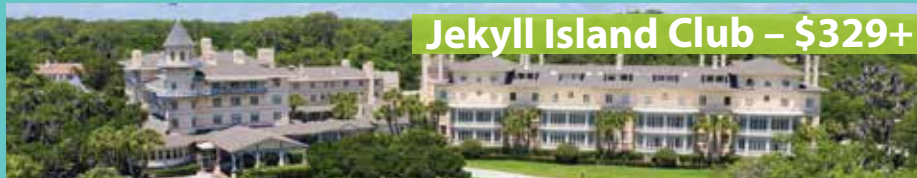
Carlin Isles is a two-time U.S. Olympian, world-renowned rugby player, and one of the fastest men to ever play the sport. Known internationally for his explosive speed and electrifying presence, Carlin brings an unmatched energy that inspires audiences everywhere he goes. Born in Akron and raised in Jackson, Ohio, he rose from humble beginnings to global stages through discipline, faith, and an unwavering belief in his purpose.

Before rugby, Carlin was an All-American sprinter with a 10.13 in the 100m and briefly played in the NFL with the Detroit Lions. His fearless transition to rugby launched him into international stardom, earning him spots in the 2016 Rio and 2020 Tokyo Olympics and millions of views on his highlight reels showcasing his signature breakaway runs.

Beyond athletics, Carlin holds an MBA and uses his story to empower others to break limitations, embrace their gifts, and pursue greatness with passion and resilience. His speaking style is energetic, faith-driven, and contagious—reminding people that with heart, discipline, and purpose, anything is possible. 🏈



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## Need to Know!

**REGISTRATION INFO:**

The 2026 Convention will take place at the **Jekyll Island Convention Center** with hotel room blocks available at several hotels nearby.



# SEEN&HEARD

Members making news and news for GDA members.

## Dr. Jaha Howard Elected to Georgia State Senate

The GDA is pleased to share the exciting news that one of our own, Dr. Jaha Howard, has won his election to the Georgia State Senate. Dr. Howard is the dentist and owner of A+ Pediatric Dentistry of Atlanta in the Vinings neighborhood of Cobb County. He will represent Senate District 35, which includes parts of Cobb and Fulton counties. His victory reflects strong support from voters across the district and marks an important milestone in his commitment to public service.

Please join us in congratulating Senator-elect Dr. Jaha Howard. We look forward to working with him as he begins his service in the State Senate and represents District 35 and communities across our state.



## Dr. Alex Riccardi Named Dental College of Georgia Young Alumnus of 2025

Dr. Alex Riccardi was recently honored as the Dental College of Georgia's 2025 Young Alumnus of the Year, an award presented annually to one graduate who demonstrates exceptional contributions to the profession. Dr. Riccardi shared that she was "blown away," humbled, and deeply honored to receive the recognition.

Her commitment to organized dentistry has been a defining part of her career, with active involvement in the Georgia Dental Association, the Hinman Dental Society, the Pierre Fauchard Academy, and the Academy of Facial Esthetics. She also credits numerous mentors, especially her father, Dr. Lou Riccardi, for shaping her as both a clinician and professional.

Dr. Riccardi describes dentistry as both challenging and deeply rewarding, highlighting the joy of helping patients overcome anxiety, relieve pain, and restore confidence in their smiles. She

also remains grateful for the strong foundation and lifelong relationships she built at the Dental College of Georgia.

Congratulations to Dr. Riccardi on this outstanding achievement!







## Dr. Cesar Tapia Recognized with Associate Fellowship and Mastership Distinctions in Implant Dentistry

Dr. Cesar Tapia was recently honored as an Associate Fellow of the American Academy of Implant Dentistry (AAID) at the organization's 2025 Annual Conference in Arizona. This prestigious recognition reflects his advanced training, clinical proficiency, and continued commitment to excellence in implant dentistry.

In addition to this achievement, Dr. Tapia also earned Mastership status in the International Congress of Oral Implantologists (ICOI) and the American Academy of Implant Prosthodontics (AAIP), further underscoring his dedication to providing the highest standard of implant care.

"I am honored to have earned Associate Fellowship from the American Academy of Implant Dentistry, one of the most respected implant organizations in the country," Dr. Tapia shared.

"I pursued this achievement with one goal in mind: to better serve my patients by providing advanced, compassionate implant care that leads to truly life-changing outcomes."

Congratulations to Dr. Tapia on these significant professional milestones!



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# CELEBRATING MEMBERSHIP—GDA

## Welcome New Members

### Mid-October to December 2025

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)

Dr. Fathima Ambrin  
Dr. Kamyar Dehdashti  
Dr. Lilian Ha  
Dr. Michelle Jacque  
Dr. Kahina King  
Dr. Thanh Nguyen  
Dr. Brandon O'Neal

#### Northwestern District (NWDDS)

Dr. Greg Goggans  
Dr. Jeff Heath  
Dr. Hetesh Ranchod  
Dr. Andrea Russell

#### Central District (CDDS)

Dr. Destiny Corbett

#### Southeastern District (SEDDS)

Dr. Carla Stappenbeck

## How Can We Help?

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## SHINING A LIGHT ON GEORGIA'S DENTAL INSURANCE MARKET: What Public Records Can Tell Us

Jon Hoin, GDA Senior Health Policy Manager

The world of dental benefits is too often an opaque and confusing place. It can be difficult to understand what a dental plan covers, what it is actually worth, and where it will be most useful. Providers and patients both experience frustration when dental plans fail to facilitate access to treatment. The American Dental Association (ADA) and its component societies continue to seek policy changes that put the provider and the patient back in the driver's seat.<sup>1</sup> Georgia has had some success in passing common sense laws that help shift the balance of power, but understanding where the state needs to go next requires an evaluation of its existing landscape.<sup>1</sup>

Dental benefits, or the lack thereof, affect everyone. The ADA Health Policy Institute estimates that 62.4% of adults aged 19-64 have private dental coverage in the United States.<sup>2</sup> This would be the equivalent of 4.1 million Georgians.<sup>2,3</sup> Adding children and seniors means one could expect private dental insurance to affect the dental care of just over half the state's population. Medicaid covers an additional 1.9 million people, and the rest are, for the most part, uninsured.<sup>4</sup>

In general, access to dental benefits correlates with access to dental care. In every age group, privately insured people are more likely to have a visit than those without private insurance. Just over half of adults with private coverage saw a dentist in 2022, whereas just under a quarter of publicly covered adults did, and only 15% of uninsured patients had a visit on record.<sup>2</sup> Children are a little better, with privately covered individuals at 63.3% and publicly covered individuals at 43.7%.<sup>2</sup>

### Exploring State Public Records

Public records can help contribute to the discussion. Georgia receives hundreds of filings related to dental insurance each year by way of the System for Electronic Rates

and Forms Filing (SERFF).<sup>5</sup> While these filings represent only a small portion of dental coverage in the state, they can offer insights that can be leveraged to help future reform efforts.

SERFF filings between 1/1/2023 and 10/24/2025 were examined in order to explore Georgia's insurance landscape. Dental filings in SERFF are sorted into 4 categories: marketing, form, form/rate, and rate. For this report, only rate and form/rate filings were reviewed.

Following the compilation of an initial list, filings were then excluded based on predefined criteria. Filings must have been marked closed and approved on the date of review and been the most recent filing for a given plan. Plans with additional non-dental coverage, such as bundled dental, vision, and hearing plans, were excluded.

Data was collected through manual review of each filing. Actuarial memorandums and transmittal forms were reviewed whenever available. Data points of interest included target loss ratio, cumulative loss ratio, individual or group classification, direct written premium, and number insured. Select rate manuals were also examined.

The time-period under review yielded 40 plans covering almost 395,000 people, but 14 of the filings were for new products with limited information. This is a small portion of Georgia's dental benefits market, and it represents filings from individual and group plans. Overall, the National Association of Insurance commissioners (NAIC) reports that Georgia has 947,311 enrollees in plans that file with them.<sup>6</sup> Self-insured plans cover a substantial portion of the remainder of Georgia's population.

### What the Average Consumer Pays

The 40 plans available for review through SERFF paint a picture. Direct written premiums per insured person per month ranged from \$3.92 (Kaiser Foundation Health Plan) to \$62.62 (Anthem Blue Cross

Blue Shield). The median plan costs \$26.95 (AETNA). The Median value is broadly in line with NAIC's 2024 aggregate dental premium per member per month, \$29.78 with \$26.09 in claims.

Much of the variation in consumer cost can be attributed to design. The Kaiser Foundation plan (KPGA-134647112) is a large group plan covering just over 23,000 people that offers limited coverage of preventative procedures. The Anthem plan (ANTV-134345170) covers close to 18,000 people with a much broader range of potential benefits and higher annual maximums. Both plans incorporate design elements that are unusual compared to the typical dental insurance plan. For example, Anthem provides options for annual maximums ranging from \$500 to unlimited and an annual maximum carryover provision. Most dental plans include an annual maximum, typically ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year, and they typically cover both preventative and restorative procedures.<sup>7</sup>

### How Much Does the Typical Plan Actually Spend on Dental Care?

Loss ratios are broad measures of how much insurance plans spend on patient care. Calculating a loss ratio can be as simple as dividing spending on claims by premium revenue, but certain definitions may allow for the inclusion or exclusion of certain factors, like taxes or quality improvement efforts, from the equation.<sup>8</sup> Georgia's aggregate loss ratio for dental insurance hovers around 77.7%.<sup>6</sup> In other words, around 23.3% of premiums are retained by companies for things like administrative expenses and profits. Of the 40 plans included in this analysis, target loss ratios range from 50% (DentaQuest) to 80% (Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia). The median plan in the dataset is any one several with a target of 65%.

Not all plans hit their targets, but many





# Don't forget to renew your membership!

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Now!*





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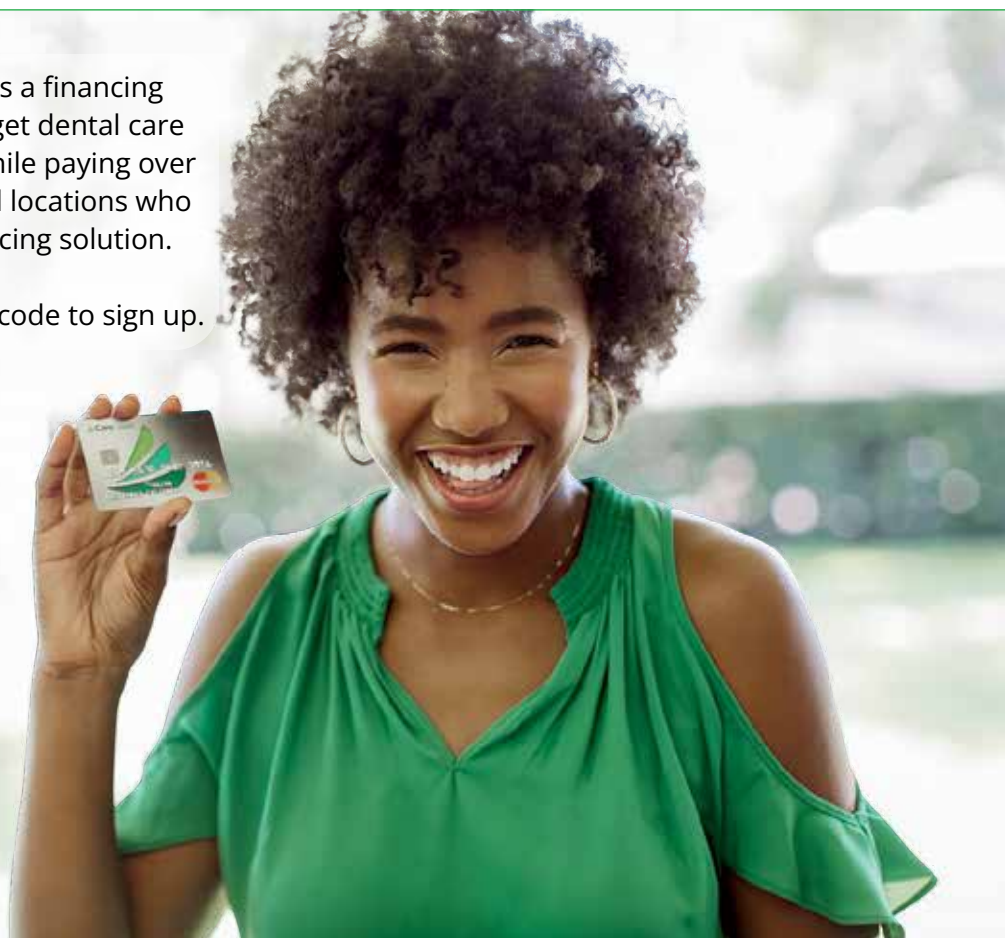
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## CE Requirements for Dentists in Georgia

At least **40 Hours of Continuing Education** must be obtained in the 2026 – 2027 biennium.

### Further requisites of the 40 hours:

- ☐ 30 hours must be clinical courses in the actual delivery of dental services to the patient or to the community
- ☐ 20 hours can be from webinars and other forms of online CE
- ☐ 20 hours must be obtained in-person
- ☐ 2 hours of CE regarding infection control in dentistry, including education and training regarding dental unit water lines
- ☐ 1 hour of CE on the impact of opioid abuse and/or the proper prescription writing and use of opioids in dental practice per renewal period
- ☐ 1 hour of CE in legal, ethics and professionalism in dentistry  
*For the complete LEAP CE description, please check out the links below.*
- ☐ Proof of CPR certification as taught by the American Heart Association, the

American Red Cross, the American Health and Safety Institute, the National Safety Council, EMS Safety Services, or other such agencies approved by the board. Four credit hours for successful completion of the in-person CPR course required by Georgia law may be used to satisfy continuing education requirements per renewal period.

## CE Requirements for Dental Hygienists

At least **22 Hours of Continuing Education** must be obtained in the 2026 – 2027 biennium.

### Further requisites of the 22 hours include:

- ☐ 15 hours must be clinical courses in the actual delivery of dental services to the patient or to the community
- ☐ 11 hours can be from webinars and other forms of online CE
- ☐ 11 hours must be obtained in-person
- ☐ 1 hour of CE in legal, ethics and professionalism in dentistry  
*For the complete LEAP CE description, please check out the links below.*
- ☐ 2 hours of CE regarding infection control in dentistry, including education and training regarding dental unit water lines
- ☐ Proof of CPR certification as taught by the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, the American Health and Safety Institute, the National Safety Council, EMS Safety

Services, or other such agencies approved by the board. Four credit hours for successful completion of the in-person CPR course required by Georgia law may be used to satisfy continuing education requirements per renewal period.

## Dentists and Dental Hygienists: Don't forget these requirements!

- ☐ **MATE/DEA Training** (8 hours)
  - ☐ **Required for:** DEA-registered practitioners
  - ☐ **Date required:** Next DEA registration submission (This one-time training requirement will not be part of future DEA registration renewals.)
- ☐ **OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Training**
  - ☐ **Required for:** Any staff that may come into contact with blood
  - ☐ **Date required:** Annually
- ☐ **HIPAA Training**
  - ☐ **Required for:** All staff, new hires
  - ☐ **Date required:** Code of Federal Regulation (CFR § 164.530) requires HIPAA training for all staff, new hires within a reasonable period of time
- ☐ **Radiation Safety Training** (6 hours)
  - ☐ **Required for:** Dental Assistants or anyone that did not get radiation safety training in their dental education
  - ☐ **Date required:** Prior to the use of X-ray equipment
- ☐ **Phlebotomy Training**
  - ☐ **Required for:** Dental Assistants, licensed Hygienists and Dentists before performing phlebotomy or venipuncture
  - ☐ **Date required:** Prior to the performing phlebotomy or venipuncture
- ☐ **Pharmacology, Anesthesia, Emergency Medicine or Sedation** (4 hours)
  - ☐ **Required for:** Dentists in practices with a sedation permit
  - ☐ **Date required:** For license renewal – end of 2027
- ☐ **Administration of Local Anesthetic** (2 hours)
  - ☐ **Required for:** Dental Hygienists administering local anesthesia pursuant to rule 150-5-.07
  - ☐ **Date required:** Two hours per biennium
- ☐ **Use of a Dental Diode Laser** (2 hours)
  - ☐ **Required for:** Dental Hygienists using dental diode lasers pursuant to rule 150-5-.08
  - ☐ **Date required:** Two hours per biennium

For the complete details on CE requirements, contact the Georgia Board of Dentistry at 404-651-8000 or view online at:

- **Dentists:** <https://rules.sos.ga.gov/GAC/150-3-.09>

- **Dental Hygienists:** <https://rules.sos.ga.gov/GAC/150-5-.05>

For more information on GDA courses that meet the requirements, visit [gadental.org/events-ce](https://gadental.org/events-ce)



# BUILDING A CYBER-SAFE DENTAL PRACTICE: Modern Defense Strategies for a Modern Threat Landscape



**TJ BLACKMON**

Chief Information Officer,  
TaaSPAK, LLC

Walk into any modern dental office today, and you'll see technology everywhere—from digital X-rays and scheduling systems to online billing and patient communication tools. These innovations have revolutionized how you deliver care and manage your practice. But with that convenience comes a growing risk: **cybercrime**.

Cyberattacks against healthcare providers are rising at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, healthcare data breaches have grown dramatically in recent years <sup>[1]</sup>. Dental offices, even small ones, are attractive targets because of the sensitive patient data they hold—names, addresses, insurance details, and health records. A single cyber incident can cause devastating financial losses, operational downtime, and reputational harm.

The good news? You don't need to be a large corporation with an in-house IT department to protect your practice. By putting a few smart measures in place, you can drastically reduce your risk and keep both your patients and your business safe. Here are seven essential cybersecurity layers every dental organization should adopt.



## 1 Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR): Beyond Traditional Antivirus

If your practice is still relying on traditional antivirus software, it's time to upgrade your defenses. Older antivirus programs work by recognizing known malware "signatures." But today's cyber threats evolve faster than those systems can update.

That's where Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) comes in. Think of EDR as the modern security system for your computers—it doesn't just block threats; it watches, learns, and reacts. EDR tools continuously monitor activity on your devices, looking for anything suspicious: strange file behavior, unauthorized logins, or unexpected data movement. When something doesn't look right, EDR can isolate that device instantly, stopping the threat in its tracks <sup>[4][5]</sup>.

For a dental practice, that means ransomware or malware can be contained before it spreads across your network. EDR provides the real-time insight and control that traditional antivirus software simply can't match.

## 2 Next-Generation Firewalls: Smarter Protection at the Network Level

A firewall acts like the front door security guard for your network—it decides who gets in and who stays out. But older firewalls rely on simple rules, like blocking certain ports or websites. Today's cybercriminals are far more sophisticated.

Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs) take protection to another level. They can analyze data traffic in real time, inspect the contents of files and emails, and even recognize malicious behavior before it causes harm <sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup>. NGFWs can block phishing sites, stop suspicious downloads, and enforce security policies that fit your practice's needs.

For dental practices, especially those handling HIPAA-protected data, an NGFW adds an intelligent layer of defense between your internal systems and the internet. It's not just about keeping attackers out—it's about making sure every piece of data that flows through your office is safe and compliant.

## 3 The Human Firewall: Training Your Team to Spot the Red Flags

Here's the truth: your employees are your first line of defense—and sometimes your biggest vulnerability. Most cyberattacks begin with a phishing email designed to trick someone into clicking a malicious link or sharing their login information. The 2024 Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report found that the majority of healthcare breaches involve human error <sup>[8]</sup>.

That's why every dental team needs a "human firewall." Regular cybersecurity training helps your staff recognize and avoid threats. Phishing simulations—sending fake scam emails as a test—can help reinforce that training in a safe way <sup>[9]</sup>.

It only takes one mistaken click to open the door to an attacker. But when your front desk staff, hygienists, and billing coordinators know what to look for—like suspicious attachments or messages with urgent requests—they can stop an attack before it begins. Training builds confidence and awareness, and that makes your whole office stronger.



## 4 Backup and Recovery: Preparing for the Unexpected

Imagine waking up one morning to find that all your patient files are encrypted by ransomware—or that your main computer crashed overnight. Without a reliable backup, that's a nightmare scenario.

A secure, encrypted, off-site backup system is your digital safety net. Modern cloud-based backups automatically encrypt and store your data in a secure location far away from your main system. Even if your office suffers a cyberattack, hardware failure, or natural disaster, your data remains safe and recoverable <sup>[10][11]</sup>.

But here's the key: backups only matter if they actually work. That's why it's crucial to test them regularly. Schedule periodic restoration drills to make sure you can recover your files quickly when you need to. Just like practicing for an emergency evacuation, testing your backups gives you peace of mind and ensures your recovery plan works when it counts.

## 5 Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA): The Simple Step That Stops Hackers

We've all been there—trying to remember yet another password or resetting one we forgot. Unfortunately, passwords alone just don't cut it anymore. Hackers can steal them, guess them, or buy them on the dark web.

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) adds an extra step that makes a huge difference. It requires you to confirm your identity in two or more ways: a password (something you know), a code from your phone (something you have), or a fingerprint (something you are) <sup>[12][13]</sup>. Even if a hacker gets your password, they can't log in without that second factor.

Microsoft reports that MFA can block 99.9% of account compromise attempts <sup>[12]</sup>. Enabling MFA on your email, practice management software, and cloud storage systems is one of the easiest, most affordable upgrades you can make. It's like adding a deadbolt to your front door—it's simple, but incredibly effective.

## 6 Cyber Insurance: Your Financial Safety Net

Even with strong security, no system is bulletproof. That's why every practice should carry cyber-liability insurance. These policies help cover the costs of recovery if a breach happens—things like data restoration, legal fees, patient notifications, and even public relations assistance <sup>[14][15]</sup>.

It's also important to review your policy every year. Insurance providers are now requiring proof that you have certain protections in place—like MFA, EDR, and staff training—before they'll renew coverage. Completing your annual cybersecurity assessments not only ensures coverage but also keeps your practice aligned with industry best practices.

Think of cyber insurance as your last layer of protection. You hope you never need it—but you'll be thankful it's there if you do.

## 7 HIPAA Compliance and the Cost of Negligence



Cybersecurity isn't just about protecting data—it's also about protecting your practice from serious financial

penalties. Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), dental practices are legally required to safeguard patient information. When those safeguards fail, the fines can be steep.

HIPAA penalties are tiered based on the level of negligence, ranging from unknowing violations to *willful neglect*. Even an unintentional lapse—like sending unencrypted patient data or failing to install a software update—can result in fines between \$100 and \$50,000 per violation. Cases involving reasonable cause (such as lack of proper staff training) can incur similar fines, while willful neglect can reach \$1.5 million annually for repeated offenses. Beyond the financial impact, violations can also lead to criminal penalties, including potential jail time for knowingly

mishandling protected health information (PHI).

The lesson for dental practices is simple: compliance isn't optional. Regular cybersecurity training, documented policies, encrypted systems, and verified backups not only prevent data loss—they protect your business from costly HIPAA violations and reputational damage.

## Building a Culture of Cyber Awareness



Cybersecurity isn't just an IT issue—it's part of patient care. Every member of your team plays a role in protecting

sensitive data and maintaining your patients' trust. Just like brushing and flossing prevent cavities, ongoing cybersecurity hygiene prevents breaches and downtime.

Start with the basics: deploy EDR, install next-generation firewalls, train your staff, secure your backups, enable MFA, and maintain cyber insurance. These steps aren't complicated, but together, they form a powerful defense that can save your practice time, money, and stress.

Your patients trust you with their smiles—and their personal information. By building a cyber-safe dental practice, you're protecting both. 🦷

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. Breach Portal. [https://ocportal.hhs.gov/occr/breach/breach\\_report.jsf](https://ocportal.hhs.gov/occr/breach/breach_report.jsf)

<sup>2</sup> IBM Security & Ponemon Institute. Cost of a Data Breach Report. <https://www.ibm.com/reports/data-breach>

<sup>3</sup> American Dental Association. Cybersecurity for Dentists. <https://www.ada.org/resources/practice/practice-management/cybersecurity>

<sup>4</sup> CISA. Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR). <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/edr-basics>

<sup>5</sup> NIST. Special Publication 800-83. <https://csrc.nist.gov/publications>

<sup>6</sup> Gartner Research. Magic Quadrant for Network Firewalls. <https://www.gartner.com/en/documents>

<sup>7</sup> CISA. Network Security Best Practices. <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/network-security-best-practices>

<sup>8</sup> Verizon. 2024 Data Breach Investigations Report. <https://www.verizon.com/business/resources/reports/dbir/>

<sup>9</sup> FTC. Cybersecurity for Small Business: Phishing. <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/cybersecurity-small-business>

<sup>10</sup> HIPAA Journal. HIPAA Compliant Data Backup Requirements. <https://www.hipaajournal.com>

<sup>11</sup> National Cybersecurity Alliance. Backup Your Data. <https://staysafeonline.org>

<sup>12</sup> Microsoft Security Blog. MFA Prevents 99.9% of Account Compromises. <https://www.microsoft.com/security/blog>

<sup>13</sup> CISA. Implementing Strong Authentication. <https://www.cisa.gov/strong-authentication>

<sup>14</sup> NAIC. Cybersecurity Insurance: What You Need to Know. <https://content.naic.org/consumer.htm>

<sup>15</sup> ADA. Cyber Liability Insurance for Dentists. <https://www.ada.org/resources/practice/practice-management/cyber-liability-insurance>

# GDA MEMBER PROFILE

## Dr. Kisha Carter



### DR. KISHA CARTER

**GDA DISTRICT:**  
Northern District Dental Society

**PLACE OF WORK:**  
BLUSH Dental Studio

**DENTAL SPECIALTY:**  
General

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

Surprisingly, a dentist! I was interested as early as elementary school, but by 7th grade, that interest really solidified. I had multiple dental experiences around that time—some positive, some not so much—and they left a strong impression on me. Being told I was numb when I wasn't, and not feeling heard, made me realize how important compassion and communication are in healthcare. At the same time, I was drawn to the hands-on aspect of dentistry, the attention to detail, and the blend of science and artistry. It all came together, and I was sure that this was the path I wanted to take. Looking back, it feels like it was meant to be.

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

When I was a child, I had a few really difficult visits to the dentist. One that stayed with me was being told I was numb, but I wasn't. I can still remember the sharp pain, the panic of not being believed, and the sense of helplessness in that chair. It made me afraid of dental visits for a long time. That early discomfort became motivation. Today, I strive to create an environment where patients—especially those with fear or past trauma—can feel heard, respected, and comfortable every step of the way.



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. Kisha Carter.**

**GDA**

### What is your favorite GDA benefit?

My favorite GDA benefit would have to be the insurance services, as I find myself using them the most. The range of coverage and ease of access to these services really helps me feel secure, both personally and professionally. I've also been able to take advantage of the continuing education opportunities, which have been valuable for keeping my skills up to date and staying informed about industry changes. Additionally, GDA Dental Supply Company has been a great resource for dental supplies at competitive prices, which helps me maintain a high standard of care while managing costs effectively.

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

Digital dentistry! Digital dentistry has transformed the way we deliver care by enhancing precision, efficiency, and the overall patient experience. In my practice, we use digital impressions to streamline treatment planning and the fabrication of restorations such as crowns and bridges. This technology allows for a faster, more predictable workflow while greatly improving comfort and outcomes for our patients.





### What advice would you give to a dental student?

Dentistry is as much about people as it is about teeth. Develop your ability to explain procedures, alleviate anxiety, and build trust with patients.

### What is a fun fact about yourself?

One thing people might not know about me is that I used to be a dental assistant. It was an invaluable experience. I learned so much about patient care, the importance of teamwork, and the ins and outs of the dental field. It definitely shaped the way I practice dentistry today.

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

I create healthy smiles! 🦷





# LAW Day 2026

**Thursday | February 12 | 2026**  
**8:00 AM**

**Georgia State Capitol, Second Floor**  
**Capitol Square SW, Atlanta, GA 30334**

## What to Expect:

**Morning Arrival and Check-in:** Kick off the day with your fellow members as we gather under the Gold Dome! Upon arrival, you'll receive your GDA ties and scarves – a proud symbol of unity and advocacy for Georgia dentistry. This year's color is butter yellow. Please feel free to plan attire accordingly.

**Recognition in the House and Senate Chambers:** Experience the excitement as GDA is formally recognized on the floor of both chambers. This is your moment to see advocacy in action and celebrate the impact of organized dentistry.

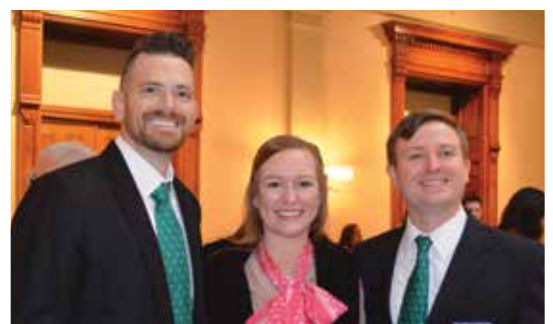
**Networking Lunch:** Join colleagues and GDA leaders for a casual lunch and conversation before heading into afternoon meetings. It's a great time to connect, share insights, and prepare key talking points.

**One-on-One Meetings with Legislators:** Put advocacy into action! Meet directly with your state legislators to discuss the issues that matter most to Georgia dentists and their patients. Your voice makes a difference – this is your chance to be heard!



Scarves and ties created  
by Wilson & Bow.

**Wilson & Bow**  
Custom Ties & Textiles







# GDA

## Legislative Insider

**The 2026 legislative session began on Monday, January 12th, 2026.**

We are entering our second year of the 2025-2026 biennium. Any legislation that did not make it through the process in 2025 remains in play in the coming session. The 2026 session could be very interesting given that it is a major election year. Next fall, we will vote for a new Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, etc. This could play a role in the kind of legislation that is introduced and passed by the legislature. The GDA's legislative priorities include dental insurance reform, protecting our I/DD population, growing the dental workforce pipeline, and working to bring more dentists to the underserved parts of our state.

Visit  
**[gadental.org](https://gadental.org)**  
to view our  
legislative  
insider!

The Georgia Dental Association will keep a close eye on the removal of community water fluoridation, roll backs to tort reform, and changes made to the budget. An average year sees the introduction of 600 pieces of legislation, and it is important that we stay vigilant for anything that could affect our member dentists.

The 2026 session brings a handful of new legislators due to three special elections that happened in December 2025. The leadership in the House will remain the same, but the leadership in the Senate will see some changes. In the Senate Republican Caucus, Senator Shawn Still will serve as the Caucus Chairman, Senator Clint Dixon will serve as the Vice-Chairman, Senator Kay Kirkpatrick will serve as the Secretary/Treasurer, Senator Jason Anavitarte will serve as the new Majority Leader in the Senate, and Senator Larry Walker will serve as the President Pro Tempore. The leadership in the Senate Minority Caucus should remain the same.

The Georgia Dental Association is looking forward to an exciting and successful legislative session. We 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 opposing, what is happening with the state's budget, and everything else happening under the gold dome. 🏛️

**We Want**

*you!*

**Would you like to become a part of our grassroots efforts under the Gold Dome?**

Sign up to become a Contact Dentist and be the direct line between your legislator and the profession of dentistry.

**Visit [gadental.org](https://gadental.org) to sign up!**





# IN MEMORIAM

*We honor and remember the Georgia Dental Association members who passed away in 2025. Their dedication to dentistry, their patients, and their communities has left a lasting impact. We celebrate their lives and the contributions they made to our profession.*



## **Central District (CDDS)**

Fred Eugene Beall Sr., DDS  
Allen Julian Bowen, DMD

## **Northern District (NDDS)**

Jay Michael Auerbach, DMD  
Stanley Brickman, DDS  
Charles Boyd Christian, Jr., DDS  
Tony Kim, DMD  
Donald Bryan McGinty, DMD  
Michael Joseph Press, DDS  
Mark Rabin, DDS  
David K. Warfield, III, DDS  
Wilton Langford White, DDS

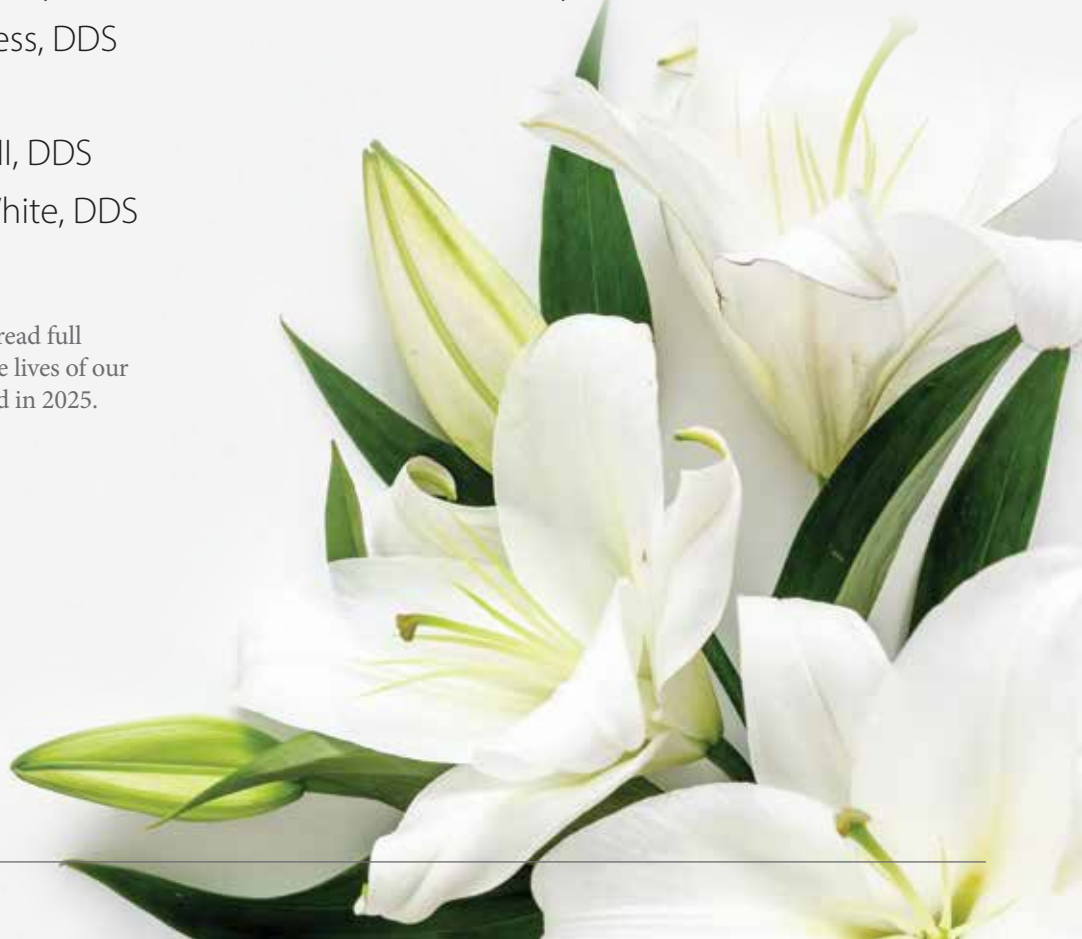
## **Northwestern District (NWDDS)**

Mark Todd Edwards, DDS  
Joseph Jeffrey Kincaid, DMD  
Thomas H. Turner, Jr., DDS  
Ronald M. Wand, DDS

## **Southwestern District (SWDDS)**

Randall R. Benner, DDS  
James "Mike" Langenfeld, DDS  
Mitchell Lewis Flynn, DDS

Please visit our website to read full obituaries and celebrate the lives of our GDA members who passed in 2025.



# EXPANDED DUTIES & CORONAL POLISHING Instructors



**Dr. Sammy Carden**

Drs. Sammy Carden and Nancy Myerson are Locum Tenens General Dentists around Atlanta, GA. They own Tooth Be Told, LLC. Dr. Sammy and Dr. Nancy do not own a dental practice. They are fill-in dentists when the owner dentist is out of the office. They are also Lead Clinical Instructors for the Georgia Dental Association.

“By utilizing new technologies and techniques, our mission is to help our patients improve their self-esteem and smile more often. We love

to see patients happy after pain has been relieved or a broken tooth has been restored. We aim to have a great bedside manner and always be full of smiles.”

Dr. Sammy Carden graduated dental school at the Medical College of Georgia in 1976. Dr. Myerson graduated Tufts Dental School in 1995 and completed a General Practice Residency at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, CT. Drs. Carden and Myerson are active members of the Northern District Dental Society (NDDS). Dr. Myerson served as NDDS Editor from 2020 to 2025 and currently serves as the Remembrance and Caring Liaison on the GDA's Membership Committee. Both Dr. Myerson and Dr. Carden represent NDDS as delegates to the GDA House of Delegates. They are also very active in the American Dental Association. Dr. Sammy and Dr. Nancy enjoy traveling to destinations for cooking, trying new restaurants, and spending time with their children and families.



**Dr. Chris Adkins**

Dr. Chris Adkins is an Emory School of Dentistry graduate. He has been practicing general dentistry for 40 years.

He is married to his lovely wife, Helen, and they have three adult sons of whom they are extremely proud. He began his career in the U.S. Navy, treating recruits from all over the country, at the now defunct Orlando Naval Recruit Training Center. He then returned to Atlanta as an Emory Faculty GPR instructor until he established his private practice in the suburbs of South Atlanta. Dr. Adkins has served the dental community as a lifelong member of the Northern District Dental Society, the Georgia Dental Association, and the American Dental Association, Hinman Dental Society, Pierre Fauchard Academy, the American College of Dentists, and the International College of Dentists.

Dr. Adkins has recently semi-retired to the Georgia coast where he now enjoys working two days per week in a large group practice (and for those of you who are detail oriented, “yes” he is now a member of the SEDDS). With this “life change,” he now has time to enjoy yard work, beachcombing, reading, fishing and travelling. Dr. Adkins looks forward to any opportunity to engage dental auxiliaries via GDA Expanded Duties Training courses in the best ways to enhance their careers and improve the dental and overall health of Georgia citizens (the real challenge will be trying to do it nearly as well as Dr. Becky Weinman has done it for the last 20 plus years).



**Dr. Samantha Cook**

Dr. Samantha Cook grew up in Columbus, GA, in a military family. After graduating from Harris County High School, she attended

Columbus State University for three years as an undergraduate. She was accepted to the Dental College of Georgia, where she completed her doctorate. Upon graduation, Dr. Cook returned to Columbus, GA, to serve her hometown. Her interests include comprehensive care, cosmetic dentistry, and pain-free dentistry. When she is not finding

ways to make the patients of Newnan smile, she is playing tug-of-war with her English Bulldog, Gamora. You can also find her at any concert, building the latest Lego creation, or nerding out at DragonCon. Dr. Cook is the 2018 Columbus Technical College Alumni of the year. She is a member of the Georgia Dental Association and the American Dental Association.



**Dr. Trudy-Ann Frazer**

Dr. Trudy-Ann Frazer is a board-certified pediatric dentist originally from Lucea, Jamaica, who practices in Atlanta, GA. She is

an international speaker renowned for her skillful combination of chairside dental care and educational leadership, particularly in teaching dental professionals how to treat children in the dental setting with ease, teaching dental professionals how to overcome burnout, and lecturing dental students in preparation for the National Dental Board Examination. Dr. Trudy-Ann was honored to be the Host and Master of Ceremony for the American Dental Association's 2024 National Smilecon Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Driven by her own defining moments, including overcoming professional dissatisfaction and burnout, Dr. Trudy-Ann is committed to fostering resilience and self-empowerment among dental professionals. Her goal is to guide them towards a life of balance and self-worth. She passionately leads a wellness podcast series, “Not Just A...Dentist”, and a wellness retreat company, where she advocates for a holistic approach to health encapsulated in her “PMS Formula” that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being for dental professionals. Through collaborations with brands and influencers who resonate with her holistic health philosophy, she aims to build a supportive community. 🦷

# Georgia Mission of Mercy **IS COMING!**

**April 18-19, 2026** | Ben Massell Dental Clinic,  
Atlanta



## ***More Smiles, More Impact***

**Georgia Mission of Mercy (GMOM)** returns in 2026 with a new, community-focused approach. Smaller, more frequent events will be held at local clinics, bringing care directly to patients where they live and work. Each clinic will serve roughly 200 patients, and your time, expertise, and support are essential to make these events a success.

Your involvement helps provide the clinical supplies, materials, and support needed to transform lives while strengthening connections between dental professionals and the communities they serve.

## **Join Us TODAY**

**and help make GMOM 2026  
the most impactful year yet.**



**Scan  
to volunteer.**



*“Seeing a patient leave with  
a healthier smile is a reminder  
of why we became dentists  
in the first place.”*

— Dr. Richard Weinman, Volunteer Dentist



## The GDA Foundation at Work

Beyond GMOM, the GDA Foundation strengthens oral health across Georgia through programs that touch lives in many ways:

- **Children's Dental Health Month** – Educating children and families about the importance of lifelong oral health habits.
- **Share a Smile** – Providing community-based donated dental care to neighbors in need.
- **Special Olympics, Special Smiles** – Delivering compassionate dental screenings and preventive dental services to athletes with intellectual disabilities.
- **Pull for Smiles** – Hosting a charity clay shoot that raises vital funds to support GDA Foundation programs.

Together, these initiatives reflect the Foundation's ongoing commitment to improving oral health and building healthier, happier communities statewide.

## Making an Impact



### Danny's Story

Danny, who is deaf, communicates through his smile. When a severe dental infection took it away, the Share a Smile program gave him the care he needed to bring back his smile and ability to express himself.



### Helping Smiles Happen

*"It's a good feeling to go home and realize that we've done something wonderful for individuals who may not have had access to care."*

— Drs. Praneetha Kumar and Hari Digumarthi, Volunteer Dentists



## GET INVOLVED!

Your time, talent, and support make a real difference:

- ✓ **Volunteer** at GMOM 2026 or Special Smiles events
- ✓ Provide **donated** care through the Share a Smile program
- ✓ **Promote** oral health during Children's Dental Health Month
- ✓ **Attend** or **sponsor** Pull for Smiles
- ✓ **Donate** to support outreach and no-cost clinics
- ✓ Visit [\*\*\*gadental.org/foundation\*\*\*](https://gadental.org/foundation)

Together,  
we make  
Georgia  
smile.



# MEET **GDA's** President 2026

Igniting  
the  
Future

## **PRESIDENTIAL FOCUS AREAS**

- Position GDA for Long-term Success
- Foster and Sustain Membership Growth
- Prepare Members for Innovation and Change

A portrait of Peter Shatz, DDS, MBA, a middle-aged man with short grey hair, smiling and wearing a light blue plaid blazer over a white shirt. He has his arms crossed. The background is a plain, light grey wall.

**Peter Shatz, DDS, MBA**

"The  
Georgia  
Dental  
Association  
is YOUR family,  
community,  
and safety net."



### *We invite you to join*

Dr. Peter Shatz and his wife, Tami, for the **2026 GDA President's Trip to Iceland**, taking place **November 9–15, 2026**. This experience will highlight Iceland's most iconic natural wonders—including black sand beaches, waterfalls, hot springs, whale watching, and the Northern Lights.

This trip is designed to bring our GDA community together for relaxation, adventure, and shared memories. We hope you'll be part of this incredible journey.

*Stay tuned for more information!*



Dr. Peter Shatz and wife, Tami.

## Dear GDA Family,

I have drafted this first official update as your 2026 President on the train heading home from the 160th ADA annual meeting and House of Delegates. I am relaxing peacefully as I have seen that our association is strong and our leadership pipeline is full. The stressors and concerns I have heard from our member dentists are shared nationally. Staffing, turnover, third party payors, access to care for our most vulnerable of populations, student and new dentist debt, sustainability, and self-care may hang heavy on you, but remember, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. Your voice has been heard, and your concerns shared with your local, state and national colleagues of this amazing and wonderful community.

In visiting the far reaches of our state, I see that we have more in common than we have differences. You care, heal and advocate for the health and well-being of the citizens of Georgia and for the protection of our profession which has given us so much.

The value of being part of organized dentistry goes far beyond insurance (health, personal and business lines), continuing education, group purchasing options and preferred vendor access. The Georgia Dental Association is YOUR family, community and safety net. We are here for you, to advise, to support and to uplift. However, like your own family, place of worship or friends, if you don't call, visit or congregate, it is an untapped asset. When you engage, you become activated, motivated and enriched.

I am a 30-year, full-time practicing periodontist in the greater Atlanta area. I have seen first-hand the amazing opportunities and daunting challenges which a dentist faces to find the right practice model for their needs and personalities. However, the constant thread throughout my career has been you, the members of the Georgia Dental Association.

Looking ahead to 2026, I am excited to share my Presidential Initiatives — *"Igniting the Future,"* focused on three key goals:

- **First**, to adopt 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**, to foster and sustain long-term membership growth by creating a welcoming environment for all Georgia dentists and encouraging active engagement and volunteerism across the association.
- **Third**, to prepare GDA members for innovation and change in the healthcare industry, equipping our members to navigate evolving technologies, regulations, and patient care models.

**This is your Association in motion.** I am honored to be your president for a brief time and hope to make the upcoming year the best it can be. Feel free to reach out to me — call, text, email or DM. Let me know how I may be of service to you.

*Let's keep the chairs reclined and the doors (or mouths) wide open.*

Respectfully,

**Peter Shatz, DDS, MBA**

2026 President, Georgia Dental Association





Dr. Shatz with his (L-R) sister-in-law, brother, mother, and wife



Dr. Shatz scuba diving



Dr. Shatz with his (L-R) youngest daughter, wife, eldest daughter, and her partner



Dr. Shatz's middle daughter



## Meet Dr. Shatz,

a periodontist in the greater Atlanta area and the Georgia Dental Association's 2026 President. In this role, he will focus on positioning the association for long-term success, fostering sustainable membership growth, and preparing dentists for innovation and change.

A GDA and ADA member for 30 years, Dr. Shatz has held leadership roles at the national, state and local levels, including GDA President-Elect, President of the Northwestern District Dental Society, and Chairman of Georgia's 5th District Delegation. Nationally, he served on ADA councils and committees, and was General Chair of SmileCon, the ADA's flagship conference. He has delivered 100+ presentations and authored multiple dental textbooks and chapters.

Dr. Shatz received his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from McGill University, a Certificate in Periodontics from Louisiana State University and an MBA from Louisiana State University Shreveport.

Outside of dentistry, Dr. Shatz enjoys boating, playing tennis, going to the gym and spending time with family in Florida's Big Bend area. He frequently

travels to visit family in Colorado, Texas and Montreal, and has visited destinations across Europe, Asia, Central Asia, and Australia. He is especially looking forward to the 2026 President Trip to Iceland and invites GDA members to join him on the trip, November 9-15, 2026.

Dr. Shatz and his wife, Tami, have four grown children and recently welcomed their first granddaughter! 🇺🇸



Dr. Shatz's stepson, daughter-in-law and granddaughter



**CDDS** Central District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

**Katie Garvin**  
Central District



## Tell Us About Yourself

I graduated from Medical College of Georgia in 2007. I am a general dentist and just recently purchased a practice in Macon. Prior to that, I worked for my father in Fort Valley for 18 years. My husband, Cameron, is also a general dentist and we have three children: Reese (16), Calder (13), and Mathews Monroe (7). The children keep me pretty busy, but I love to play tennis and watch college football. I also love to read and spend time with my family and friends!



## Organized Dentistry

As the daughter of a dentist, I've been involved with organized dentistry pretty much my whole life! As a student, I was involved in ASDA and attended the Annual Meeting if my schedule allowed. I enjoy the camaraderie organized dentistry provides, but more importantly, I see and appreciate how it works so hard to protect the integrity of our profession.



## Current Challenges in Dentistry

The biggest challenge I see facing dentistry is the rising cost of everything! It will affect so many aspects of our profession, from patient treatment acceptance to overhead costs. Now, more than ever, we have to educate our patients on the importance of taking care of their mouths and to not view their oral health as optional, but as necessary to maintain overall health.



## Looking Ahead at 2026

My goal for this year is to re-engage our members. The Central District historically has a very involved membership, but we need to engage the younger dentists more effectively. It is important for them to really grasp the benefits of not only what GDA does for the profession, but the benefit of staying involved and keeping their finger on the pulse of dentistry. 🌱







**EDDS** Eastern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Michael Pruett Eastern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I grew up in Brunswick, Georgia, and knew in the second grade that I wanted to be a dentist. I went to Georgia Southwestern College in Americus and then to dental school at the Medical College of Georgia. Following dental school, I completed a 2-year hospital GPR program at the University of Virginia. Following a teaching stint in Connecticut and private practice in South Georgia, I ended up teaching at the Dental College of Georgia for 26 years. I currently live in Augusta and help run the Athens GPR Program, along with practicing several days a week locally. Outside of dentistry, I love traveling and spending time with family and friends!



### Organized Dentistry

I served as my class president for all four years of dental school and have been a part of organized dentistry since then. I'm a current life member of the ADA/GDA and have always known that we all need to stay involved in order to preserve the profession that we are blessed to be a part of! We have to educate everyone in our profession, young and old dentists alike, that being a part of organized dentistry is the single most important thing we can each do to preserve the profession. In this world of "I'll do it only if it benefits me," we have to find a way to show everyone that membership and involvement benefit us all!



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

In my opinion, the single greatest challenge that dentistry currently faces is involvement in organized dentistry. This lack of involvement will ultimately cost us our ability to advocate for our patients and profession at all levels and will allow those outside of our profession to control how we practice.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

I personally want to find a way to foster more involvement in the GDA at our local level. We in the Eastern District are the home of the Dental College of Georgia, and I would like for us to find a way to motivate our young colleagues now so that they will never know what it is like not to be involved! 🌱





**NDDDS** Northern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Lyndsay Langston Northern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I grew up in Marietta and attended the Medical College of Georgia. Then, I completed my residency through the U.S. Army serving 7 years as an active duty officer. I moved back home to Atlanta, and I am fortunate to practice at PerioAtlanta, continuing the legacy of the practice founded by Dr. Marvin Sugarman in 1938. Outside of dentistry, I love spending time with my husband, Brett, and our three children, attending their activities, spending time at the lake, and serving in our church and community.



### Organized Dentistry

I joined the ADA and GDA right out of dental school, but my involvement in organized dentistry began with Dr. Richard Sugarman, my mentor, inviting me to my first Northern District Dental Society meeting. His example showed me the value of professional advocacy, collaboration, and camaraderie within the Georgia Dental Association. Since then, I've had the privilege of serving in several leadership roles and growing in my understanding of organized dentistry.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

One of the ongoing difficulties I see is member engagement across all levels of the tripartite—ADA, GDA, and our local districts. It's increasingly challenging to connect with and engage with members, many of whom may not immediately see the value of organized dentistry. Yet their participation is essential to maintaining a strong voice for our profession, particularly in advocacy and legislation that directly affects how we practice in Georgia.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

My goals for the upcoming year focus on creating value for our members and strengthening engagement within our district with new and experienced members. I hope to increase participation in continuing education programs, encourage new graduates to get involved in leadership, and grow our Contact Dentist Program, so that we're available to support our legislators with accurate and timely information on dental policy. By fostering connection, mentorship, and advocacy, I hope to help build a stronger and more unified dental community for the years ahead. 🌱



**NWDDS** **Northwestern District**  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Chris Rautenstrauch Northwestern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I am a general dentist in a private group practice in Woodstock, Georgia. My path to dentistry was not straight. Prior to dental school I worked in construction management for 7 years but found that it was not a good fit for me. Through much soul searching I found dentistry, and I now wake up every day excited to go to work. I grew up in Florida but moved to Atlanta in 1992. I am married and have two sons, one of whom is currently in dental school at DCG. I enjoy mountain biking, physical fitness, hunting, and an occasional round of bad golf.



### Organized Dentistry

I joined the GDA upon graduation because I felt like I should support an organization that was supposed to support me, although I didn't really know how they did that. When a friend invited me to my first LAW Day at the Capitol, my eyes were opened to one of the GDA's most important functions, advocacy. Our legislators come from all walks of life. They are lawyers, small business owners, teachers, plumbers, etc. The vast majority of these legislators know nothing about dentistry or healthcare, but they want to do what they believe is right for the people of our state. There are many well-funded and organized voices in their ears telling them what is "right." The GDA does its best to be a voice that the legislators can trust as a true advocate for our profession and for the people of the State of Georgia. It can be a messy job, and I have always been impressed by the high-quality people in the GDA that tirelessly go to bat for our profession.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

There is a great consolidation happening in dentistry, as in many industries. That is just a natural result of evolving business practices and the economy. I do not want to see dentistry follow a similar path to medicine, where we end up in a world where we have lost our autonomy and where our schedules and practice methods are dictated to us.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

I want to increase membership and increase engagement. I especially want to invest in the new dentists. They are the future of dentistry, and I want them to understand that there is so much to be gained from having a strong organization. Higher membership means better leverage in all things, including governmental influence and in pricing negotiations in any marketplace. Together we thrive and have increased opportunities for education, camaraderie, business operation efficiencies, and much more. 🌱





**SEDDDS** Southeastern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Bryan Benton Southeastern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I am an oral and maxillofacial surgeon practicing in Savannah, Georgia, and a partner in a privately owned oral surgery practice. I am originally from Macon, spent time in Augusta during my training, and I also lived and worked in North Atlanta prior to settling in Savannah. I am proud to call Georgia home and to support the profession of dentistry through my involvement with the GDA. Outside the office, my wife and I welcomed a baby boy in June. I enjoy spending time with my family, hunting, cooking, and working on home projects. I take pride in building a practice that emphasizes excellent patient care and a supportive team environment.



### Organized Dentistry

I became involved in organized dentistry to support and protect our profession at the legislative level, to connect with outstanding leaders in dentistry, and to give back to a profession that has provided me with a fulfilling career. I find it rewarding to work alongside other dentists to advocate for our profession, improve access to care, and collaborate with legislators to ensure high-quality dentistry for the people of Georgia.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

We continue to face a number of challenges, including maintaining patient access to care, preserving the doctor-patient relationship amid declining reimbursements and increasing financial pressures, and addressing workforce shortages among dentists, hygienists, and assistants. High educational costs, ongoing tort and regulatory considerations, and evolving practice models further contribute to this complexity. I hope my involvement with the GDA will help ensure the Southeastern District has a voice in efforts to address these issues.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

I want my focus to be on highlighting the value of GDA membership and encouraging engagement within the district. Dentistry continues to evolve and I want serve the dentists of the southeastern district by advocating on their behalf in matters that effect their current and future practice. By strengthening communication and involvement at the district level, we can better support dentists in their practices and more effectively represent their interests with legislators at the state level. 📌





**SWDDS** Southwestern District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Jesse McMillan Southwestern District



### Tell Us About Yourself

I am a private practice general dentist in Adel. I am married to Mandy, and we have three children, Carter (14), Mary Evelyn (11), and Cliff (9). We live in Enigma on the farm where I grew up. Mandy is a Physician Associate, and my kids say she is the real doctor in the family! I enjoy traveling (planning the trip almost as much), hunting, saltwater fishing, and watching the kids play sports.



### Organized Dentistry

Dr. Jessica Brown stayed after me for several years to join the officer chain. I finally accepted right as she was phasing out. I see now the importance of organized dentistry and its impact on the profession as a whole. From networking to lobbying, the GDA has been such a reward, and I hope to pass that on to younger dentists.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

It is important to have a unified voice to combat the many problems facing dentists today. Rising costs, lower reimbursements, and access to specialists are some of my challenges in a rural office. The Southwestern District does a great job of providing required continuing education, and we have recently started hosting a recruitment social at the dental school each year to hopefully entice new graduates to practice in South Georgia.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

My goal for this year is to increase membership numbers in our district by reaching out to those dentists who are no longer members and to encourage the new dentists to join by showing them the importance of the GDA. When dentists understand the benefits and potential impact of the GDA, membership is the best bang for your buck. 📍





**WDDS** Western District  
GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## Annie Wilson Western District



### Tell Us About Yourself

Hi! I am a general dentist, and I have the incredible honor of practicing at Childress Dental Center where I serve patients in LaGrange and Hogansville. I attended the University of Georgia before pursuing my dental degree from the Dental College of Georgia where I met my husband, Zach, who practices in Fayetteville. We live on a small farm in Newnan with six dwarf goats, two livestock guardian dogs, and our rescue dog, Winston. I'm passionate about providing intentional, patient-centered care to the communities I serve. Outside of dentistry, I love tending to the farm with my husband, gardening, and spending time with family and friends on Lake Wedowee.



### Organized Dentistry

I attribute my involvement in organized dentistry to Zach's lifelong dental mentor, Dr. Jeff Kendrick. From day one he has been instrumental in immersing Zach and me in the world of organized dentistry through the GDA and the Hinman Dental Society. Organized dentistry is essential because it gives dentists a unified voice to advocate for the profession, protect patient care, and influence policies that directly impact how we practice. It provides education, resources, and support that individual practitioners can't easily access on their own.



### Current Challenges in Dentistry

Dentistry today faces significant challenges that impact both the profession and patient care. One major issue is the growing shift from privately owned practices to large corporate dental groups, which can limit a dentist's autonomy and create pressure to prioritize production over ethical, individualized treatment. At the same time, there is a declining interest among younger dentists in becoming involved in organized dentistry. This lack of engagement threatens the profession's ability to advocate effectively, uphold high standards, and maintain a strong collective voice during a period of rapid change. Getting younger dentists involved is vital and will ultimately shape the future of the profession.



### Looking Ahead at 2026

In the year ahead, I plan to focus on encouraging and recruiting more members to become part of the Western District by organizing additional continuing education events and opportunities for connection. I believe that growing and strengthening our Western community is essential for the future success of our fellow dentists. This growth will ensure we have the support, resources, and unified voice needed to navigate the evolving landscape of our profession together. 🌱



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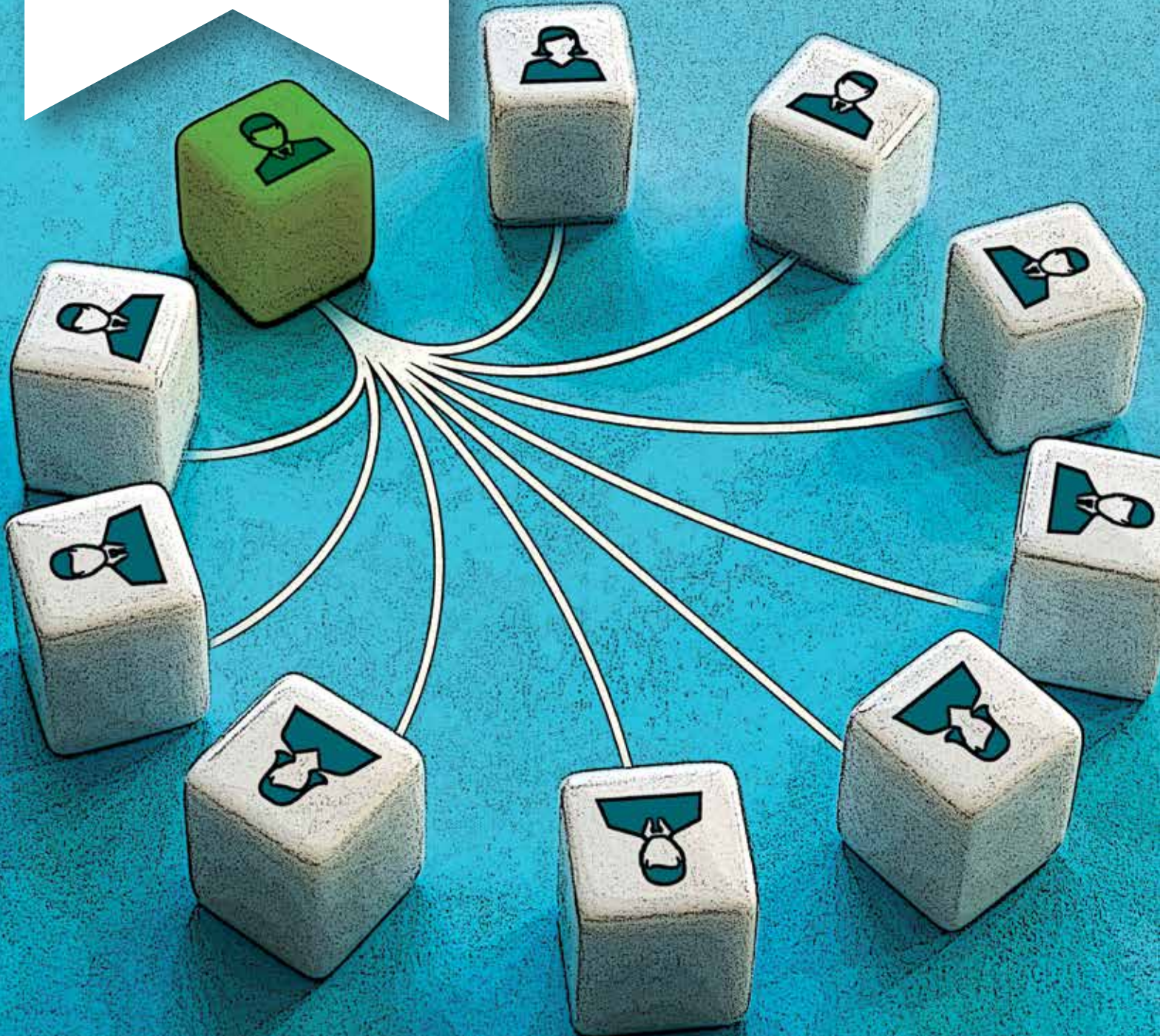
MEET THE SPEAKERS >





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GDA 2026 Committees, Councils, & Task Force.



## GDA DISTRICT MAP AND COUNTY LIST

### District Dental Societies

#### NORTHERN ■

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 ■

Banks, Burke, Clarke, Columbia, Elbert, Franklin, Glascock, Greene, Habersham, Hancock, Hart, Jackson, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lumpkin, Madison, McDuffie, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Rabun, Richmond, Stephens, Taliaferro, Towns, Union, Washington, Warren, White, and Wilkes.

#### CENTRAL ■

Baldwin, Bibb, Bleckley, Butts, Crawford, Crisp, Dodge, Dooly, Houston, Jasper, Johnson, Jones, Lamar, Laurens, Monroe, Montgomery, Peach, Pike, Pulaski, Putnam, Spalding, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Twiggs, Upson, Wheeler, Wilcox, and Wilkinson.

#### WESTERN ■

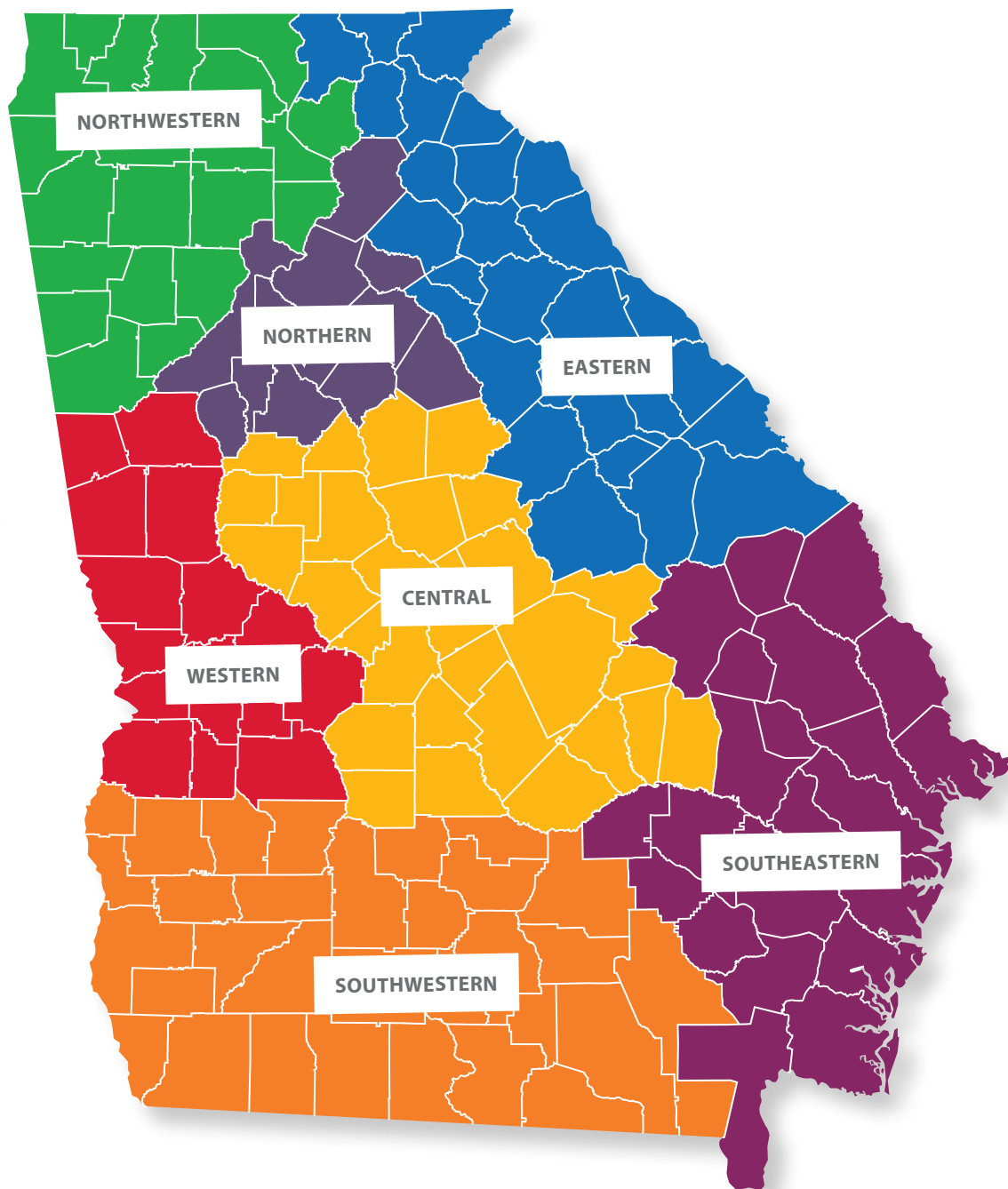
Chattahoochee, Coweta, Harris, Heard, Macon, Marion, Meriwether, Muscogee, Schley, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taylor, Troup, and Webster.

#### SOUTHWESTERN ■

Atkinson, Baker, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, Calhoun, Clay, Clinch, Coffee, Colquitt, Cook, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Echols, Grady, Irwin, Lanier, Lee, Lowndes, Miller, Mitchell, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Turner, Ware, and Worth.

#### SOUTHEASTERN ■

Appling, Bacon, Brantley, Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Candler, Charlton, Chatham, Effingham, Emanuel, Evans, Glynn, Jeff Davis, Jenkins, Liberty, Long, McIntosh, Pierce, Screven, Tattnal, and Wayne.





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Implant dentistry has evolved dramatically over the past decade, with advances in implant treatment options, restorative design, digital planning, 3D printing and CAD/CAM workflows. While these innovations have made implant therapy more predictable, they have also increased complexity.

Many clinicians face challenges with multiple implant systems, differing abutment connections, and management of surgical and restorative phases. These complexities can lead to longer treatment times, higher costs, and potential complications.

Simplifying implant dentistry is about creating a streamlined, efficient workflow that maintains clinical precision and esthetic outcomes while reducing errors and frustration.

## Complexity in Modern Implant Dentistry and Its Solution

While implant therapy has become more predictable, it has also become more complex due to several factors:

### 1 Multiple Implant Systems

There are dozens of implant brands and platforms on the market, each with its own connection type, diameter options, and component library. Clinicians often need to maintain knowledge of multiple systems, which can be challenging when switching between cases or treating patients with existing implants.

It's crucial for clinicians to streamline and limit the number of implant systems used within their practice. Managing multiple systems can quickly become confusing due to variations in surgical kits, prosthetic components, and clinical protocols. This complexity not only increases the risk of errors but also places unnecessary stress on the clinical team, who must constantly differentiate between systems and organize a wider range of parts and instruments.

### 2 Variety of Restorative Components and Options

Implant restorations involve a wide variety of abutments, screws, healing abutments, and provisional components.

Each implant platform—whether internal hex, external hex, conical, or tri-lobe, etc.—has its own unique parts and handling requirements. Using an incompatible or incorrect component can result in misfit restorations, screw loosening, or compromised esthetics.

Even within a single implant system, multiple platform sizes and variations may exist, adding another layer of complexity to restorative management.

### 3 Digital vs. Analog Workflows

Some practices rely on traditional impressions and laboratory communication, while others use full digital workflows with CBCT, intraoral scanning, and CAD/CAM fabrication. Managing the interface between these workflows can be confusing, especially when combining analog and digital data.

There is no doubt that a fully digital workflow offers a more streamlined, efficient, and predictable process, reducing errors, saving time, and enhancing communication between the

clinical and laboratory teams. Digital integration ultimately leads to greater consistency, accuracy, and confidence in both surgical and restorative outcomes.

### 4 Communication Gaps

Treatment often involves collaboration between the clinician, laboratory, and surgical team. Without standardized protocols, miscommunication about component selection, soft tissue management, or restoration design can occur, leading to errors and remakes.

Using a simple system to scan whether it's a single implant, multiple implant case or full arch will facilitate the transfer of data to the lab and prevent errors and unpleasant surprises at delivery time.

### 5 Immediate vs. Delayed Protocols

Immediate placement, immediate temporization, immediate loading of single implants or full-arch cases add another layer of complexity. Each approach requires careful sequencing and timing to ensure predictable esthetic and functional outcomes.

Each patient is unique, and the treatment protocol should be tailored to their specific clinical and esthetic requirements.

### 6 System-Specific Protocols and Verification

Each implant system comes with its own specific verification steps and torque recommendations, which are essential to ensure mechanical stability and biological success. Adhering to these manufacturer guidelines is critical for the long-term performance of the restoration. Overlooking or inconsistently applying these protocols can lead to component failure, screw loosening, or peri-implant complications that compromise both function and longevity.

### 7 Complexity of Some Procedures

Certain implant cases present significant challenges due to limited bone availability, anatomical constraints, or the need for immediate loading. In such situations, precision and planning are essential. Utilizing a surgical guide can greatly simplify these complex procedures by ensuring accurate implant positioning, minimizing intraoperative guesswork, and improving surgical predictability. Guided surgery allows clinicians to achieve safer, more consistent results, while reducing stress and chair time during demanding cases.





## Surgical Guides: Simplifying Complex Procedures

Surgical guides have become one of the most valuable tools for improving accuracy and confidence in implant placement. By incorporating CBCT data and intraoral scans, clinicians can plan implant position, angulation, and depth virtually before surgery. This pre-planning minimizes guesswork, protects anatomical structures, and ensures that the implant emerges in the correct restorative position.

Using a guided approach also simplifies communication between the surgical and restorative teams. The precise fit and stability of a properly fabricated guide help reduce intraoperative stress and shorten surgical time, especially in complex or full-arch cases. In situations with limited bone, anatomical challenges, or immediate loading protocols, a surgical guide can be the difference between a compromised result and a predictable, esthetic outcome.

In short, surgical guides transform complex implant cases into controlled, repeatable procedures—allowing clinicians to focus on precision and patient comfort rather than intraoperative decision-making.

## In-Office Printing and Milling: Enhancing Efficiency and Predictability

The ability to print and mill restorations in-office has significantly changed the way implant workflows are managed. Modern 3D printers and milling units enable clinicians to design, fabricate, and deliver components faster and with greater accuracy than ever before.

In-office 3D printing allows for the fabrication of surgical guides, verification jigs, and even full-arch provisional restorations directly from the digital files. This eliminates laboratory turnaround time and gives clinicians full control over the workflow. When modifications are needed, they can be made instantly and reprinted within minutes, providing unmatched flexibility and responsiveness.

Milling in-office enables the production of highly precise single and multiple crowns, ensuring an excellent fit and esthetic match. Combined with digital scanning and CAD/CAM design, these technologies reduce manual steps, improve reproducibility, and allow for same-day treatment options when clinically appropriate.

Integrating both printing and milling capabilities within the practice streamlines the digital workflow, enhances predictability, shortens chair time, and significantly improves the patient experience.

Overall, these factors contribute to a workflow that can feel overwhelming, even for experienced clinicians. Streamlining these elements is essential to

reduce errors, save chair time, and improve patient outcomes.

## Why Simplification and Workflow Optimization Matter?

Workflow optimization in implant dentistry benefits both the clinician and the patient, enhancing efficiency, consistency, and overall outcomes.

### Clinical Benefits

- Reduced chair time through fewer procedural steps, leading to improved efficiency and lower overall cost.
- Minimized errors in laboratory communication—particularly with impression taking or scanning, abutment selection, and restoration seating.
- Enhanced predictability and a more streamlined workflow across all stages of treatment.

### Patient Benefits

- Shorter treatment timelines, with fewer appointments required.
- Less discomfort and reduced need for postoperative adjustments.
- Higher satisfaction through more consistent esthetic and functional results.

Simplifying and optimizing the workflow makes treatment more efficient and straightforward, saving both the clinician and the patient valuable time that would otherwise be spent troubleshooting complex processes or managing unnecessary complications.

## The Role of Digital Workflow

Digital dentistry has revolutionized implant treatment planning and execution. Integration of CBCT imaging, intraoral scanning, and CAD/CAM design allows for:

- 1 **Precise virtual planning** – Implant position and angulation can be visualized in 3D, avoiding anatomical risks.
- 2 **Accurate prosthesis fabrication** – pre-designing the prosthesis reduces adjustments, troubleshooting and improve passive fit. Also helps with planning the implants positioning and bone reduction if needed.
- 3 **Digital verification** – Laboratory and surgical teams can collaborate using shared digital files, reducing errors. Using a verification system to communicate with the lab is an integral part of the digital flow.

A consistent digital workflow is particularly helpful for multi-unit cases or immediate temporization, allowing clinicians to plan the provisional and final restorations before surgery.

## Streamlining Implant Dentistry with Complete Digital Systems

Using a complete, integrated system—from implant placement to restorative components—can significantly simplify and enhance the implant workflow. A unified digital approach minimizes confusion, improves efficiency, and delivers more predictable outcomes for both clinicians and patients.

### KEY ADVANTAGES:

- **Complete System Integration:** From the implant body to restorative components. For example, systems like TruAbutment demonstrate how integrated digital workflows can simplify and unify the surgical and restorative phases
- **Digital Workflow Efficiency:** Incorporating digital scan posts, custom abutments for single implants and full-arch cases enables precise, streamlined design and fabrication.
- **Verified Digital Libraries:** Pre-verified libraries support multiple implant platforms, ensuring accurate and reliable digital planning.
- **Custom Abutment Design:** Facilitates precise, patient-specific restorations while reducing manual adjustments.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Digital files simplify communication between the clinician and the laboratory, improving consistency and turnaround time.

By adopting a complete digital system, clinicians can minimize guesswork, reduce variability, and focus more on clinical outcomes rather than managing complex or mismatched components.

## Preventing Complications Through Simplification

Many complications arise from workflow fragmentation: misfit restorations, screw loosening, or poor emergence profiles. Simplifying workflows prevents these issues

The result is more predictable outcomes, improved peri-implant tissue health, and reduced risk of mechanical or biological complications.

## Conclusion

Simplifying implant dentistry is not about limiting options or compromising quality—it's about optimizing every step for precision, efficiency, and consistency. By integrating digital workflows and effective team communication, clinicians can achieve a predictable clinical outcome with fewer adjustments and complications, and much less chair time, resulting in improved patient satisfaction.

Ultimately, the most advanced dentistry is often the most elegantly simple. 📌

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