

# DENTAL

ASSOCIATION NEWS

**DR. PHILLIPS  
SHARES  
HER INSPIRING  
JOURNEY**

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**5 YEARS OUT  
PLANNING  
FOR LIFE  
AFTER  
RETIREMENT**

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# FROM THE CHAIR TO THE CLASSROOM

## DR. PHILLIPS SHARES HER INSPIRING JOURNEY



In the evolving dental landscape, few professionals can say they have the breadth of experience Dr. Phillips brings to her role at Chattanooga State Community College.

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tarting her career as a dental hygienist in 1980, she later ran her dental practice in Hixson, TN, for 15 years. Dr. Phillips brings a unique perspective that spans

nearly every area of the dental profession. She is actively involved with the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) to further the advancement of academic dental programs. She is also a passionate advocate for oral healthcare at the state and national levels, participating in Lobby Days for the TDA, the ADA, and the ADEA.

Dr. Phillips' career path reads like a comprehensive map of the dental field: associate dentist, staff dentist in various nursing homes, public health advocate, private practitioner, and now, dedicated educator.

As a professor in the Dental Assisting and Dental Hygiene programs, Dr. Phillips draws upon her diverse experience to educate the next generation of dental assistants and hygienists – an integral part of dental practice. Her career path through various areas of dentistry offers valuable insights not only for students

but also for dentists. In this interview, Dr. Phillips shares the wisdom from four decades of being on the frontlines of oral healthcare.

### **Tell us about your background; what made you pursue your Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree at UTHSC College of Dentistry?**

As a proud native of Chattanooga and a first-generation college student, I take immense pride in my blue-collar roots. My father worked as a machinist at the Mueller Company, while my mother contributed her skills at the Ernest Holmes Company. From an early age, they instilled in me the values of hard work, honesty, and respect for others. Their unwavering support encouraged me to pursue higher education to secure a stable working environment and achieve financial independence. I aspired to build a career that not only granted workplace autonomy but also allowed me to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Inspired by my orthodontist, I developed an interest in dentistry. I applied to the dental hygiene program at East Tennessee State University to explore dentistry and

found it enjoyable. I used my RDH credential to work while completing additional education, including a bachelor's degree at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga and a dental degree at UTHSC College of Dentistry in Memphis. I chose UTHSC due to its graduates' reputation for quality clinical dentistry and affordability as an in-state institution.

### **How has each role shaped your perspective on dentistry?**

I try to never say "no" to a professional opportunity. This approach has opened the door to a wealth of experiences in dentistry.

My initial role as a dental hygienist provided extensive knowledge about patient care, prevention of dental diseases, and treatment of periodontal conditions. This experience underscored the importance of establishing a strong periodontal foundation for effective restorative procedures.

As an associate dentist, mentors guided my professional development beyond the solid foundation offered by dental school, marking the beginning of my lifelong commitment to dental education.



**DR. TENA PHILLIPS**

Despite challenges posed by the lack of dental infrastructure, providing dental care in nursing homes within the Tri-Cities area brought significant joy and satisfaction to my professional life. I gained substantial knowledge in pharmacology and geriatric dentistry, observing firsthand how society cares for its elderly population. Nursing home patients engaged in activities like bingo, where bananas were awarded as prizes. Upon my visits, they eagerly awaited my arrival at the door. They symbolically paid me bananas during dental services, although official payments were processed through the Department of Human Services. These patients prided themselves on their history of always paying their bills, which was an endearing quality. Although earning an income as a dentist is a career goal, I am happy to help those most vulnerable in our society.

Providing dentistry within the public health sector offered a new perspective on patient care, revealing many health disparities among Tennesseans that hinder access to dental services. While children were the primary focus, emergency care was also provided for adults. I became acquainted with the Tennessee Medicaid system, later known as TennCare, which was underfunded. In the 1990s, I established an HIV Dental Clinic at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department to serve HIV-positive patients during a period of significant fear regarding HIV transmission. The Ryan White Fund, through the Health Resources and Services Agency (HRSA), granted over \$250,000 to achieve this objective, delivering highly rewarding and beneficial access to care for members of our local community.

Upon entering dental school, my goal was to own and manage a private practice. In 2001, I acquired an established practice in Hixson, TN, where patients graciously accepted me, allowing integration into the community and great satisfaction in delivering family dental services. After fifteen years of private practice, I leaped into academia. I

quickly discovered that juggling full-time practice and teaching was not sustainable. Ultimately, I decided to channel my energy solely into education—a path where I felt truly in my element and saw the potential to reach the peak of my professional journey.

The transition from clinician to educator represented a significant journey of growth and discovery and required significant effort on my part. This process encompassed developing lesson plans, integrating technology into instructional methods, acquiring classroom management skills, and navigating clinical challenges during the pandemic. With support from faculty peers and mentors, I embraced these challenges and emerged stronger. Becoming an educator gave me a newfound respect for the profession and the dedication it requires.

I am fortunate to be a faculty member at an institution that values communication with dental and education communities and encourages faculty involvement in community outreach. I have been active in the Chattanooga Area Dental Society, liaising between Chattanooga State and the dental society and facilitating open communication between dentists and allied health dental programs.

As part of my academic role, I have become a member of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), served on an advisory committee, and currently chair the Dental Assisting Section. Membership sections within ADEA provide a means for educators to communicate across the United States and Canada in their areas of interest. Additionally, for several years, I have served as an educator advocate with ADEA, collaborated with the American Association of Oral, Dental and Craniofacial Research (AAODCR) and Friends of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (FNIDCR) to provide advocacy regarding education and research to national legislators in Washington DC.

In 2024, the Tennessee Dental Association (TDA) called upon dentists to participate in “Day on the Hill” in Nashville to advocate for insurance reform. Participation in this event was highly rewarding. Subsequently, I assumed the TDA East Tennessee Vice President role and served on the Board of Trustees. In 2025, I volunteered to serve as a national advocate for the American Dental Association’s Lobby Day as part of the Tennessee Dental Association’s delegation, focusing advocacy efforts on securing appropriations for fluoride studies related to child IQ, promoting insurance reform for non-covered services, and advocating for interest deferment for dental residents during their residency.

Each step in my dental journey has been a chance to expand my knowledge and connect with new individuals, and my journey continues. As Yogi Berra once said: “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.” My path in dentistry has been profoundly shaped by the guidance and blessings of the Lord, the support of my family, and my loving husband of the last eighteen years, Retired Lieutenant Al Phillips of the Georgia State Patrol. I



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**// THE OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE CLINICALLY AND DIDACTICALLY WAS DEEPLY REWARDING, AND I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS."**

**Given your extensive clinical background before transitioning to academia, what inspired you to shift your career toward education?**

With over forty years of experience in various roles within dentistry, I have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and countless experiences to share. For twenty-five years, I volunteered as a clinical affiliate with Chattanooga State's Dental Assisting Program, mentoring students during their externships—a role that ignited my passion for education. I found immense satisfaction in teaching dentistry through hands-on learning, which led to invitations to guest-lecture and eventually instruct Tennessee Board of Dentistry certification courses in coronal polishing, dental sealants, and nitrous oxide monitoring.

The opportunity to educate clinically and didactically was enriching and I thoroughly enjoyed engaging with students. When I was honored with the offer of a full-time faculty position, I embraced it wholeheartedly. Later, I was invited to contribute to the dental hygiene department alongside my teaching responsibilities in dental assisting, and I now serve as the supervising dentist for our dental clinic. While I still cherish the relationships I built in private practice, my true fulfillment comes from shaping the next generation of dental professionals.

**What emerging trends do you believe practicing dentists should be particularly aware of?**

The ever-changing landscape of dentistry requires professionals to stay informed about technological advancements. The leaps in technology since the 1970s are amazing. Intraoral scanners are transforming traditional impression-taking and doubling as diagnosis and treatment planning tools. Similarly, 3D printing is revolutionizing crown fabrication and replacing conventional methods of creating removable prosthetic appliances.

Artificial intelligence is now an integral part of dentistry. While initially skeptical, I realized its impact by comparing it to the evolution of laundry methods. Why spend hours beating clothes on a rock by a stream when you can embrace the efficiency of a washing machine? AI enables advancements in diagnostics, treatment planning, restoration design, and patient communication, making dental care more streamlined and effective

### **How has dental education evolved since you received your DDS in 1986, and what changes do you find most significant?**

New technological advancements have significantly transformed dental school curricula as more technology is introduced and implemented into dental practice. Simulation laboratories have become increasingly prevalent for comprehensive pre-clinical training. These facilities have been integrated into numerous dental and dental hygiene colleges, allowing students to enhance their practical skills and build confidence before delivering patient care. Training programs for emerging specialties such as Oral and

points. It's essential to share personal stories with legislators about how issues impact your practice and patients. You can communicate this in person, via snail mail, email, or phone. We need to inform our legislators in Tennessee and Washington, DC, about dental needs to gain their support for relevant bills. Tennessee dentists should collectively contact their legislators to push these bills through committees, the Senate and House chambers, and finally to the Tennessee Governor or United States President for approval. Persistence is key; ask for help repeatedly to eventually achieve results. If we don't advocate, nothing changes for your profession or patients.



## **NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY TRANSFORMED DENTAL SCHOOL CURRICULA AS MORE TECHNOLOGY IS INTRODUCED AND IMPLEMENTED INTO DENTAL PRACTICE."**

Maxillofacial Radiology, Dental Anesthesiology, Oral Medicine, and Orofacial Pain have received recognition from the ADA, improved the scope of care to dental patients, and changed the landscape for educational opportunities. There has been a notable increase in the representation of women and underrepresented groups in dental education, contributing to a more diverse workforce, which is anticipated to alleviate specific health disparities among patients. A significant change in dental education is the rising cost for students, with the average student debt now exceeding \$300,000. This substantial debt creates challenges for graduates in purchasing practices. Conversely, dental schools are experiencing increased costs due to inflation affecting operational budgets and staff and faculty salaries. Managing these expenses while keeping tuition and other fees for students under control has become increasingly complex.

### **You're actively involved in government affairs, advocating for the profession. For those who may not know, can you tell us about the legislative process and the importance of being involved in advocacy efforts?**

Do you remember School House Rock's "I'm Just a Bill?..." I'm just a bill. Yes, I'm only a bill, and I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill". Look for it online! The legislative process is just like that video from my childhood. You might also navigate to the TDA website, [tndental.org](http://tndental.org), where you will find the TDA Advocacy Handbook. Both resources describe the legislative process in some detail.

Participation in advocacy, a crucial aspect of the dental profession, has been made easy, thanks to Andrea Hayes, Executive Director of the Tennessee Dental Association (TDA), and her qualified staff. They offer opportunities for Contact Dentists to engage with local legislators and organize "Day on the Hill" events with provided talking

I urge all dentists to become involved with TDA's advocacy efforts and/or provide funding. Remember, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu!" We must be present in this arena.

### **Based on your experience at the County Health Departments, what public health challenges do you see as most pressing for dental professionals today?**

Currently, my primary concern is fluoride. Given that dental caries is the most common chronic childhood disease, dentists need to champion community water fluoridation as a method of preventing decay. Although it is suggested that patients can obtain fluoride through toothpaste, rinses, or supplements and that dental sealants can prevent caries, these alternatives are not universally accessible. Removing fluoride from community water supplies would disproportionately affect the most vulnerable members of our communities.

### **What skills or qualities do you believe are essential for today's dental students that may differ from when you were in training?**

Being a successful dental professional requires a multitude of skills. Other than being proficient with computers and technology, I am not sure that skills today are so different from those in the days of my training. Students must cultivate soft skills such as effective interpersonal communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, and time management. Vital clinical skills include manual dexterity and meticulous attention to detail. I recall my instructor emphasizing that the most important step in a procedure is always "the one you are working on." Additionally, mastery of business operations is essential in the field of dentistry. Dental practices function as businesses that must generate adequate revenue to sustain their viability, thereby ensuring the ability to provide patient care.

## Having owned a practice for over a decade, what advice would you offer to dentists considering opening or expanding their practices?

The most crucial step you can take is to engage with organized dentistry and network with experienced dentists who have navigated your path. The advice they offer is invaluable. Seasoned dentists like me will likely recommend securing a financial planner and a proficient accountant and enrolling in continuing education courses that will benefit your patients and your practice. Hiring competent personnel, compensating them fairly, and fostering a positive work environment to minimize employee turnover is essential. Develop a strategy for managing debt and establish a retirement plan. Furthermore, it is necessary to regularly take vacations, exercise consistently, maintain a healthy diet, and obtain adequate sleep. It is crucial to prioritize self-care to support and care for others effectively.

Equally significant is the principle: "Take care of your patients, and they will take care of you." Consider offering complimentary care to patients who recently lost

their employment or waiving the balance for individuals experiencing significant personal hardship. You might also provide free or at-cost mouthguards to local school sports teams or free tooth whitening for soon-to-be brides. Perhaps visit your patients-of-record who are residents in nursing homes and offer free dental cleanings during your lunch hour. Patients appreciate this type of care and community service. This embodies the essence of being a dental professional and an integral community member.

## How do you see the relationship between dental assistants, hygienists, and dentists evolving in modern practice settings?

Many practices utilize dental assistants and hygienists with expanded functions training to reduce dentists' chair time and increase access to care. This also offers a career ladder for these dental professionals.

## What tech advances in dentistry have you found most impactful during your career?

Incorporating digital charts, digital radiography including 3D imaging, targeted radiation therapy for cancer

treatment, implants, lasers, impression scanners, computer designs for restorations, and 3D printers have significantly transformed the practice of dentistry. These technological advances are being introduced rapidly, posing a challenge for professionals to stay abreast of the latest developments. I have never met a dentist who didn't love a new gadget. For those new to the profession, remember that this enthusiasm for new technology must be balanced with financial affordability and the ability to integrate such technologies into existing computerized systems.

## What dental research areas are you most excited about, and why should dentists pay attention to them?

Research forms the backbone of all healthcare professions, enabling the delivery of quality care through evidence-based practices that ensure safety and effectiveness for both patients and providers. In dentistry, the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is a key resource for oral and dental research. Recently, the American Dental Association (ADA) opposed a proposal to

merge NIDCR with the Institute of Neuroscience and Brain Research, highlighting the distinct research needs of the brain and oral cavity despite their anatomical proximity.

A major concern is the debated link between fluoride and child IQ levels. The ADA has called for funding to conduct a comprehensive study in the United States to address this issue. It's important to note that the studies often cited in the media were conducted outside the U.S. and involved fluoride concentrations higher than the recommended 0.7 ppm. This research is essential to provide reliable data on the use of fluoride in community water systems and its potential adverse effects, aiming to dispel misinformation.

Why should dentists support community water fluoridation? Although an increase in dental decay might result in greater income for dental practitioners, it does not lead to a rise in the number of providers or funding available for such treatments. Communities have observed increased hospitalizations due to infected teeth, primarily caused by financial barriers to care. It is essential to prioritize patient welfare and prevent unnecessary suffering.



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# Board of Trustees Meeting Report **May 1, 2025**



The TDA Board of Trustees, chaired by TDA President **Dr. Stuart Hudsmith**, convened on May 1, 2025, at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel. Below are the key actions and reports from the meeting.



## Actions of the Board:

**Budget:** The Board approved the 2025-2026 Tennessee Dental Association budget of \$1,686,603 as prepared by the Budget & Finance Committee and amended by the Board of Trustees during Executive Session.

## Highlighted Reports:

### Treasurer's Report:

Dr. Jay Davis, Treasurer, presented the unaudited financial report as of March 31, 2025.

### Legislative Report:

Ms. Andrea Hayes, Executive Director, provided a legislative update that covered the successful fight to protect water fluoridation, a TennCare increase, and an effective Day on the Hill.

### Task Force on Governance Sustainability, Strategic Plan 2.1:

Dr. Rhonda Switzer-Nadasdi, Chair, updated the board on the task force meetings.

### Renaissance Life & Health Company:

Mr. David Pemberton and Ms. Stephanie Phillips introduced themselves to the board on behalf of Renaissance, the new TennCare Dental Benefits Manager.

### TDA Foundation:

Dr. Robert Hopper reported to the board regarding the TDAF meeting last Fall.

### Outgoing Members of the Board:

President Stuart Hudsmith recognized outgoing members of the Board of Trustees: Dr. Tena Phillips, Dr. Hope Watson, Dr. Kevin Bryant, Dr. Bob Tuma, and Dr. Chip Clayton.



# President's ADDRESS

“

The TDA is the leading voice in Tennessee supporting your decision to practice dentistry in the setting that fits you best.”



Mr. Speaker, Dr. Brett Kessler, ADA President, Dr. Fred Howard, ADA 6th District Trustee; distinguished guest, colleagues and friends, welcome to the 158th Annual Session of the Tennessee Dental Association House of Delegates.

It is my pleasure to recognize some additional special people here in the room today, our student Delegates.

It is not a mistake that you are here. You were chosen by your schools to be leaders. Your leadership opportunities do not end when you graduate. This is when they actually just begin. I encourage you to continue to be leaders and start a lifelong quest of mentoring others.

I also want to recognize our Executive Director, Andrea Hayes. Andrea possesses my favorite quality in a person. If you ask my wife, Pam, she will tell you without a doubt, that quality is consistency.

Her daily consistent behavior to pursue excellence for the Tennessee Dental Association is remarkable, her daily consistent behavior to guide and nurture her staff remarkable and her daily consistent behavior to look over the horizon, on issues and do research for the TDA board to make wise and careful decision decisions as a gift. Thank you, Andrea.

It is truly been an honor to serve as your TDA president so many exciting things are happening that make your membership more valuable.

About three years ago, the TDA board, along with our TDA staff and staff from the ADA met in Chattanooga to develop a strategic plan that address three main areas:

1. Advocacy (legislation matters)
2. Membership (with concentration on younger dentists)
3. Governance (to streamline it and make it less burdensome and more attractive for leaders)

Our staff is doing an outstanding job, implementing the plan daily.

## ADVOCACY

We have had some big wins!

**Last year:** Insurance reform that will help patients and dentists.

**This year:** Defeat of an anti-fluoridation bill, a tremendous benefit for all Tennesseans.

**This year:** We just got a tremendous increase in reimbursements for TennCare pediatric oral healthcare.

## MEMBERSHIP

1. We started bi-annual virtual meetings with all districts and component officers to inform them of state happenings and encourage local grassroots efforts to increase membership through personal testimony of the value.

2. We have enhanced our communication methods to target age specific dentists. In other words, we communicate in their preferred method.

3. We encouraged component societies to form membership committees, comprised of people that were willing to share the value of membership. I have been pleased to see an overwhelming interest from both students and early career dentists. I believe the TDA's communication efforts have helped young dentists recognize the value of having organized support from lobbyists,

attorneys, and scientific experts — resources that are far more accessible collectively. They understand that they can affect key issues such as legislation shaping their practice, insurance reform affecting their compensation and student loan reform affecting their lifestyle and borrowing power.

## GOVERNANCE

We currently have a task force in place comprised of both early career dentists and seasoned dentists. Their mission is to make recommendations on how to streamline our governance and make it sustainable for generations of dentists to come.

In closing, I want every dentist in Tennessee to know that their voice and support are invaluable to the profession.

1. You provide care for the patients in Tennessee.
2. You are leaders in your community and considered an expert voice.
3. You have someone in your life who has encouraged you to excel as a caregiver and leader.
4. Finally, you have the skill and understanding to encourage younger leaders to embrace your traditions, while empowering them to become leaders using their own unique ideas.

The TDA is the leading voice in Tennessee supporting your decision to practice dentistry in the setting that fits you best. Whether you are a sole practitioner, an employee of a group or corporation, or you work in non-profit or academics, you benefit from membership which is our core strength.

As your TDA president, I leave you with this, we are united by shared goals and collective power. I am proud to join the legacy of TDA presidents with the goal to become an inspiration for generations of dentist to come.

Thank you.

# THANK You! FOR BEING A MEMBER!

The ADA, TDA, and your local component are committed to supporting your personal and professional growth at every stage of your career.

We offer a wide range of resources to help you manage your patients, practice, and personal life more effectively. Whether it's staying informed on the latest clinical guidelines or accessing financial management tools like insurance and retirement plans, we're here to provide everything you need to succeed and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

If there's anything we can do to further support your membership experience, please don't hesitate to reach out at 615.628.0208 or email us at [tda@tndental.org](mailto:tda@tndental.org). We'd love to hear from you!

The TDA welcomes the following dentists as our new and reinstated members.

**First District Dental Society**  
Dr. Emma Anderson  
Dr. Michael Cagle

**Second District Dental Society**  
Dr. Richard Ceen

**Chattanooga Area Dental Society**  
Dr. Scott Jackson  
Dr. Kaytlyn McAllister  
Dr. David Reisinger

**Fourth District Dental Society**  
Dr. Kelly Norris

**Nashville Dental Society**  
Dr. Rachelle Ifill  
Dr. Mellanie Kim

**Eighth District Dental Society**  
Dr. DeAndra Jones

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# RENAISSANCE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DIVISION OF TENNCARE

Effective November 1, 2025, Renaissance will become the new Dental Benefits Manager for the TennCare and CoverKids programs. We are actively seeking dental providers to build our network.



## IN MEMORIAM

*The TDA honors the memory and passing of the following members:*

### **Dr. Martin R. Pittman**

was a member of the American Dental Association, the Tennessee Dental Association, and the First District Dental Society.

### **Dr. Roger Ganier Jr.**

was a member of the American Dental Association, the Tennessee Dental Association, and the Seventh District Dental Society.

### **Dr. Stanley P. Werner**

was a member of the American Dental Association, the Tennessee Dental Association, and the Memphis Dental Society.



# Numbers to Know

**American Dental Association**  
(800) 621-8099 or (312) 440-2500

**Tennessee Board of Dentistry**  
(615) 532-5073

**Tennessee Department of Health**  
(615) 741-3011

**Tennessee Dental Association**  
(615) 628-0208 | Fax: (615) 628-0214  
[tda@tndental.org](mailto:tda@tndental.org)

## COMPONENT SOCIETIES

**First District Dental Society**  
Executive Director: Savannah Bolick  
(423) 552-0222  
[firstdistrictdental@gmail.com](mailto:firstdistrictdental@gmail.com)

**Second District Dental Society**  
Executive Director: Janet Lawlor  
(865) 919-6464  
[sddsoffice@gmail.com](mailto:sddsoffice@gmail.com)

**Chattanooga Area Dental Society**  
Executive Director: Lacey Heftka  
(423) 886-9191  
[Info@ChattAreaDent.com](mailto:Info@ChattAreaDent.com)

**Nashville Dental Society**  
Executive Director: Kristen Stewart  
(615) 628-3300  
[director@nashvilledental.org](mailto:director@nashvilledental.org)

**Seventh District Dental Society**  
Executive Secretary: Dr. Larry Chambers  
(731) 217-5614  
[7thdistrictdental@gmail.com](mailto:7thdistrictdental@gmail.com)

**Eighth District Dental Society**  
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# Learning and Line Dancing: A Look Back at MCDC 2025

The 2025 Music City Dental Conference brought together dentists, staff, and students from across Tennessee and beyond for three days of learning, connection, and fun in downtown Nashville. The event took place May 1 to 3, 2025 at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel and featured top-rated speakers leading continuing education courses for the entire dental team, with sessions covering the latest in patient care, technology, and more. In addition to the classroom learning, attendees explored a bustling exhibit hall filled with the latest products, services, and innovations in dentistry. Thank you to our sponsors and exhibitors for helping make this year's event possible!

A crowd favorite this year was the Boot Scootin' Bash, where attendees swapped office wear for cowboy boots and hit the dance floor for a night of line dancing, music, and laughter.

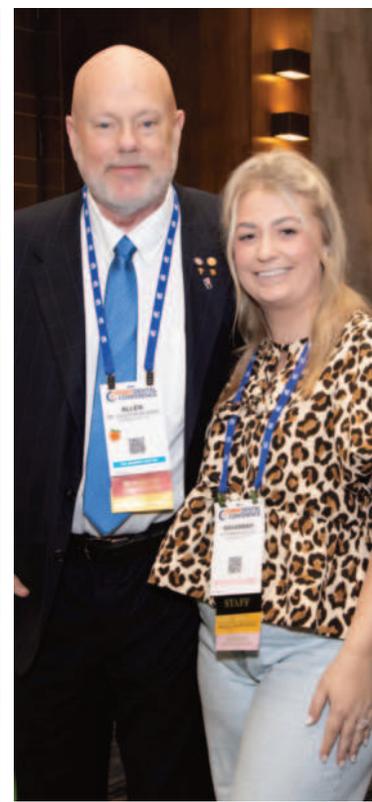
Whether you came from a nearby county or another country, we're so glad you joined us. We hope you left with new ideas, fresh energy, and connections that will last long after the conference ends.

## Mark Your Calendar for MCDC 2026

**MCDC 2026 is happening  
May 7 to 9, 2026  
at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel.**

**SEE YOU THERE!**





## DR. JACK E. WELLS MEMORIAL DEDICATION TO DENTISTRY AWARD



The Jack E. Wells Memorial Dedication to Dentistry Award, named after a former Dean of the University of Tennessee College of Dentistry, is the highest honor given by the TDA and is reserved for individuals whose personal and professional lives reflect the quality of dental practice, service to organized dentistry, contributions to dental education, and humanitarian service.

Congratulations **Dr. Samuel J. McKenna** (Nashville Dental Society) on receiving the association's highest honor.

## NEW DENTIST IMPACT AWARD



The New Dentist Impact Award honors a TDA member dentist who is less than ten years out of dental school, demonstrates exceptional leadership, and serves as a role model for other new dentists. Recipients demonstrate outstanding leadership and initiative, a strong commitment to community and the dental profession, and show promise for continued leadership in the profession.

Congratulations **Dr. Brooklin C. Byrd** (Memphis Dental Society) on receiving this inaugural award.



# 2025 AWARDS RECIPIENTS

## FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

The TDA Fellowship Award recognizes outstanding Tennessee dentists who make noteworthy contributions of their time and talent toward professional progress and the public they serve. This award is presented annually and awarded to no more than twelve deserving dentists each year. Congratulations to our colleagues!



First District Dental Society  
**DR. ANDREW D. CONKIN**



Second District Dental Society  
**DR. JOHN M. COULTER**



Second District Dental Society  
**DR. JOSHUA M. HETHCOX**



Chattanooga Area Dental Society  
**DR. JOHN A. SPANN**



Memphis Dental Society  
**DR. L. KEVIN WELLS**



Fourth District Dental Society  
**DR. JOANNE M. GAYDOS-DANIEL**



Nashville Dental Society  
**DR. ARTHUR JOEL GLUCK**



Nashville Dental Society  
**DR. MARGARET S. PITTS**



Seventh District Dental Society  
**DR. JACKIE S. MCCLAIN**



Memphis Dental Society  
**DR. NISHEL PATEL**

## 50-YEAR AWARDS

The dental class of 1975 has served dentistry in Tennessee and around the world for the past 50 years. The TDA congratulates these leaders and their efforts promoting oral health care in their community.

Dr. George L. Alissandratos  
Dr. Louis J. Bonvissuto, Jr.  
Dr. Robert Duncan Borders  
Dr. Carl A. Bradley  
Dr. Paul H. Carico, Jr.  
Dr. James D. Chapman  
Dr. Sharad Chitalia  
Dr. Steven Craig Crippen  
Dr. James David Crossley  
Dr. James W. Curtiss, Jr.  
Dr. Alfred Jay DeBusk, Jr.  
Dr. David W. Dickey  
Dr. Michael Wayne Dietz  
Dr. Larry David Dormois

Dr. Robert L. Dryden  
Dr. Douglas B. Dugard  
Dr. Dana Ronald Foust  
Dr. Leonard Ray Fuqua, Jr.  
Dr. David C. Gjedde  
Dr. Jack E. Gotcher, Jr.  
Dr. Fernando C. Heros  
Dr. H. Pitts Hinson  
Dr. George Hopper  
Dr. Dale O. Hunter, Jr.  
Dr. Henry Lee  
Dr. William G. Linebarger  
Dr. John Milton Martin  
Dr. Michael Wayne Nichols

Dr. Walter R. Owens  
Dr. Harold C. Peeples  
Dr. John P. Primm  
Dr. Michael R. Roberts  
Dr. Howard L. Rowe  
Dr. Randall Lewis Rudolph  
Dr. William Kim Salmons  
Dr. Carl W. Schulter  
Dr. Candace B. Settles  
Dr. Barry H. Solding  
Dr. Carson E. Taylor  
Dr. James McQuiston Wilson  
Dr. Artmas L. Worthy



## 5 YEARS OUT

# PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER RETIREMENT

BY DR. SUZANNE EBERT

Too often, people retire and then wonder, “Now what?” For years, work has shaped their days, months, and years. They plan vacations when things will be slow or schedule family events around their practice’s needs.

When they retire, they have nothing but time — and no meaningful way to fill that time. Sometimes this can lead to depression or frustration.

So how do you avoid this trap?

Talk to your spouse and family. What do they want to do with retirement? Your partner may remind you that you absolutely loved your annual summer trips to the lake, before life got too busy. Maybe it’s time to take another visit. You may even think about living there a few months of the year once you retire!

In the years before retirement, start testing out some of these interests to see what holds your attention. Take a class at the local community college or park district.



**CONSULT WITH A FINANCIAL PLANNER OR ADVISOR TO TALK ABOUT HOW YOUR FINANCES STACK UP AGAINST YOUR DREAMS AND PLANS.”**

Here are some ways to start cultivating your retirement lifestyle before you stop working.

### **THINK — AND TALK — ABOUT YOUR INTERESTS**

Think about the things you enjoy doing, in every realm of your life. Travel, golf, woodworking, painting, spending time with your family. Is there a cause you wholeheartedly support that you wish you could spend more time with? Or maybe you’ve always dreamed of visiting every single national park.

Try volunteering a day or two a month to find like-minded people. Doing so now will give you even more reasons to look forward to retirement.

### **TALK TO A FINANCIAL EXPERT**

Make sure you know what your finances can support, with or without your practice sale. Consult with a financial planner or advisor to talk about how your finances stack up against your dreams and plans. Build a budget so that you understand how much money you will need to live your preferred lifestyle long after you retire. A good advisor can help you understand the implications of retiring at various ages, such as Medicare timing and investment withdrawals.

Think about questions such as:

- Am I truly ready to retire, or should I wait a couple more years?
- What are my insurance needs?
- How much do I need from the sale of my practice to live a comfortable lifestyle?
- What does a “comfortable” lifestyle entail?
- If I want to do something expensive (such as travel extensively, buy a second home, pay for a grandchild’s education, etc.), how does that affect my overall needs?
- Will I need to supplement my income? What are my options?
- If something happened and I had to retire immediately, would I be prepared?

### SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

Many people would benefit from the skills and expertise you’ve spent decades building. And you will finally have the flexibility to attend the conferences you wish you had time for! Go one step further and consider speaking or presenting on a topic that you are passionate about.

Next, think about passing on the knowledge you have accumulated throughout your career to dental students or even high schools or colleges. If you live near a dental school, you might consider volunteering or becoming part-time faculty. Many schools have extramural rotation sites that are always looking for adjunct faculty to work with their students. Especially if you are interested in supplementing your retirement income, you could work as clinical faculty at a residency program. Passing your knowledge to the next generation can be incredibly rewarding. Alternatively, you could mentor a local dentist through a study club or other arrangements. Many local ADA components have mentorship opportunities.

You might also join a peer review committee or other groups. Look at product evaluation groups, such as the ADA Clinical Evaluators (ACE) Panel, which evaluates new dental products and techniques.



Passing your knowledge to the next generation can be incredibly rewarding.

### SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

*“Many people would benefit from the skills and expertise you’ve spent decades building. And you will finally have the flexibility to attend the conferences you wish you had time for! Go one step further and consider speaking or presenting on a topic that you are passionate about.”*



"free dental clinics" or talk to your local component to learn what might be nearby. And, if you are interested in a full-time opportunity, many FQHCs offer reasonable compensation with comprehensive benefits.

The ADA Foundation organizes dental Mission of Mercy clinics throughout the United States, with unlimited opportunities for dentists to practice dentistry or work with their state association to organize free dental care events.

Farther afield, some dentists elect to go to underserved countries and provide care in either a clinic setting or in rural locations. (Picture tooth extractions done in folding chairs on the side of a mountain!) There are many opportunities through organizations such as Doctors Without Borders or Haiti Outreach Ministries that organize these types of trips.

**HELP SOLVE ACCESS TO CARE CHALLENGES**

Programs like Dental Lifeline Network, Give Kids a Smile, and others can help improve access to care, whether right in your community or in another country.

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Community Health Centers (CHCs) are constantly seeking volunteers who can provide care within their clinics. The beauty of this model is that after you have been approved, you can typically let the clinic know what days you are available and what procedures you prefer to do. Then they will schedule the patients and you just show up and do dentistry! The clinic staff handles any follow-up care so you really do only what you want on your own terms. In most cases, because you are covered under sovereign immunity, you do not need to carry any malpractice insurance; the only cost is time out of your day. Search your local area for

**TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE**

Get involved with your local or state component. You can start small. Just go to a local meeting and think about running for office or becoming a delegate. Many state components offer leadership training that will give you the skills you need – you just need the time. And if you are particularly passionate about an issue, you could join the ADA's advocacy efforts and work with officials at the local, state, or federal level.

You can also consider taking leadership in another area of your life: a civic committee or council, church, charitable organization — anything you're passionate about! Both personal and professional development can open new doors. As you look to retirement, you will free up time and energy to pursue these very rewarding avenues. The earlier you start, the more you will have to look forward to.

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*This article originally appeared in ADA Career Transitions page. Visit [ada.org/resources/careers](http://ada.org/resources/careers) to discover expert guidance and resources for every stage of your career.*

“ Programs like Dental Lifeline Network, Give Kids a Smile, and others can help improve access to care...”





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# BREATHE IN, STRESS OUT

## THE POWER OF DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING IN DENTISTRY



Stress in dentistry is inevitable. New procedures, anxious patients and the mental load of making split-second clinical decisions can take a toll. Stress accumulates throughout the day, and without an outlet, it leads to exhaustion.

Fitness watches remind users to stand and move every hour. We need a similar system for mental health resilience. Try my solution. It is simple, effective and backed by science: diaphragmatic breathing.

### THIS ONE TRICK CAN INSTANTLY REDUCE ANXIETY

Diaphragmatic breathing, also known as belly breathing, engages the diaphragm to take deeper, slower breaths. It directly influences the autonomic nervous system. When patients — and dentists — are anxious, the sympathetic nervous system (remember “fight, flight or freeze”) goes into overdrive, triggering shallow breathing, increased heart rate and muscle tension.

Deep breathing shifts the body toward the parasympathetic nervous system. Activating the vagus nerve lowers cortisol levels, slows the heart rate and reduces blood pressure. The downstream effects include better oxygenation, relaxed muscles and a greater sense of control over discomfort.

The mind-mouth-body connection plays a crucial role for our patients. Stress and anxiety manifest physically, even as increased pain perception. I walk each of my patients through a few deep breaths each time I administer anesthetic. Teaching patients to breathe deeply not only eases injections but also triggers positive downstream effects.

### BUILDING A HABIT: BREATHE BEFORE YOU INJECT

The best way to build a habit is to anchor it to an existing one. Before administering an injection, I take a deep breath with my patient. This small moment of mindfulness benefits both of us. I feel calmer, and they feel more in control. Pro tip: For a double dose, you can also try a breathing break when waiting for the curing light to beep.

### HOW TO TEACH PATIENTS IN LESS THAN 30 SECONDS

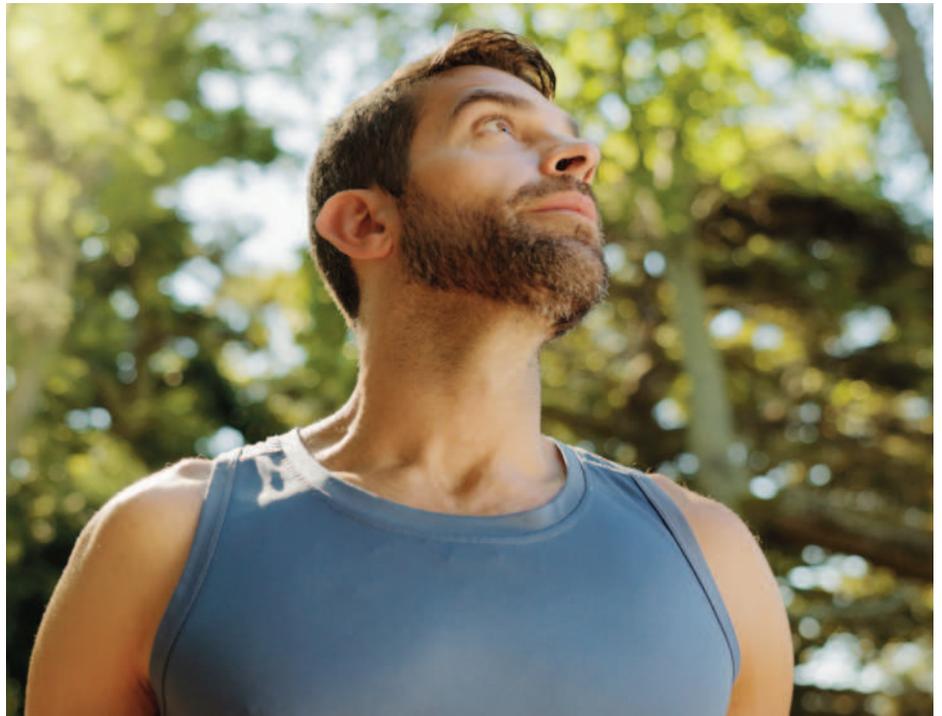
Walking a patient through diaphragmatic breathing is simple and requires no extra time in the schedule. As I put on my personal protective equipment and adjust the chair, I guide them through the following steps:

**1. “Get comfy and wiggle in the chair.”** Loosening up relieves tension.

**2. “Your job today is to focus on your breath.** Take a big breath in, pause, then breathe out.” Give them something simple to focus on.

**3. “This time, even slower.”** Slower breathing enhances relaxation.

By the time I am ready to begin the procedure, my patient is noticeably calmer. I feel calmer too.



**The mind-mouth-body connection plays a crucial role for our patients. Stress and anxiety manifest physically, even as increased pain perception.**

#### **SCIENCE PROVES THIS WORKS**

Diaphragmatic breathing is a proven method for reducing stress and anxiety. A quick PubMed search will reveal overwhelming evidence supporting its ability to lower cortisol levels, reduce depression and even aid in conditions like GERD and COPD. It is all connected — the mind, mouth and body.

Think fewer mental errors, improved focus and a more relaxed state of mind throughout the day.

#### **MAKE THIS A HABIT AND WATCH YOUR STRESS LEVELS DROP**

Some days, I struggle to find time to sip water. But there is never a day when I do not inject a patient. This technique requires no extra time and no expensive equipment. It is free, easy and immediately effective. Try it before your next procedure. You might be surprised at the results.

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*This article originally appeared April 2, 2025 in the ADA New Dentist Now blog, [newdentistblog.ada.org](https://newdentistblog.ada.org)*

*Alia Osseiran, D.M.D., is an alternate delegate for the ADA House of Delegates' 17th District and her local West Coast District Dental Association in Florida. She also serves on the ADA Large Group/Multi-Site Practice Engagement Task Force and has her 200-hour yoga teacher certification. When not at work, she can be found exploring the wild or teaching health education to children through her nonprofit.*





MUHALAB AL SAMMARRAIE, D.D.S.

# NEW DENTIST CORNER

## Mastering difficult conversations: A guide to leadership with resilience and heart

Think of a time you hesitated to speak up — a patient questioning your treatment plan, a teammate missing a deadline, a colleague pushing back. We've all been there. How we respond shapes our teams, our leadership and the mark we leave in dentistry. These moments — explaining a procedure, guiding a team or easing a patient's fear — are where leadership begins. For new dentists, mastering these conversations can mean the difference between thriving and struggling. My journey taught me they're not obstacles; they're opportunities. My first lesson? It came not in a dental office, but on a Baghdad street, facing men who had decided I wasn't going home that night.

### The conversation that changed everything

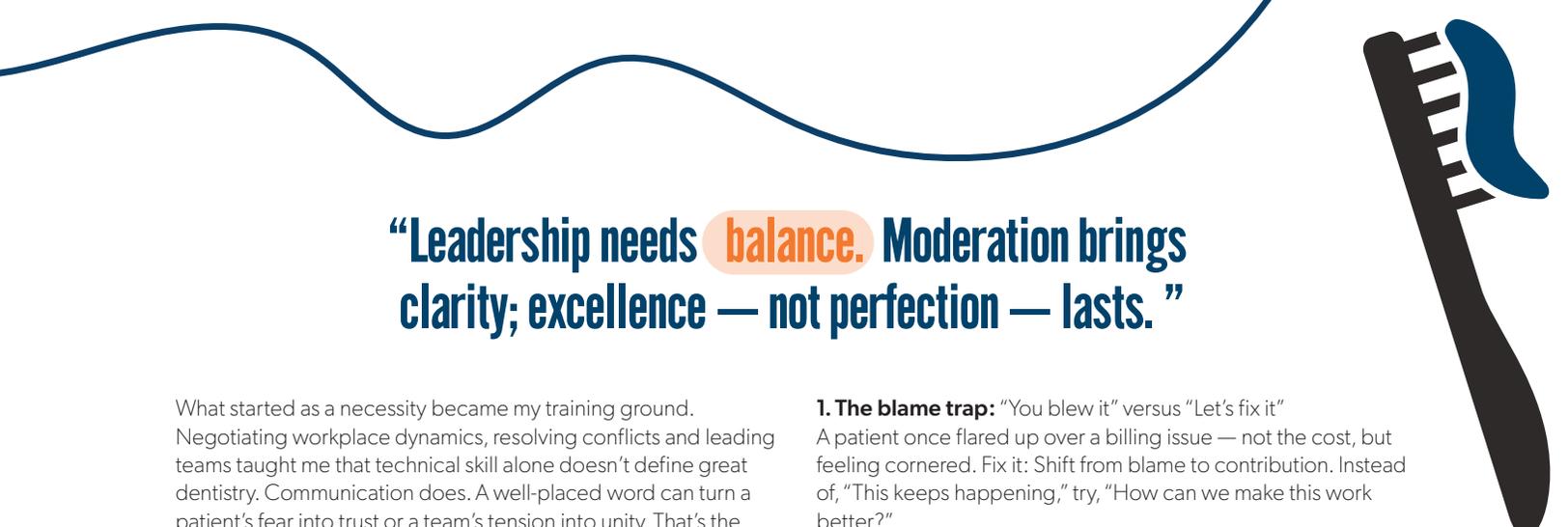
Some conversations are about policies. Some are about people. And some are about survival. Before I ever stepped into a leadership role — before human resources, management or mentorship — I learned how powerful words could be. I was a dental student in Baghdad, caught in a moment when I had to advocate for my life.

Baghdad, a cradle of poetry, history and science — the "Abode of Peace" — has long thrived with life and legacy. But after 2003, its vibrant streets, once rich with culture, faced growing uncertainty. Peace was tested, and life became unpredictable — even for a young D3 student like me, striving for a future.

I had seconds, not minutes, to think, read the room and choose words that could shift their intent. I wasn't a leader then, but I had to lead my fate with calm and logic. Somehow, I walked away. That moment didn't make me a leader. It foreshadowed the skills I'd spend a decade refining: staying calm, assessing stakes and speaking with purpose.

### From survival to leadership: The power of communication

Baghdad's unpredictability didn't just test me; it shaped me. Working multiple jobs to survive, I kept a low profile, hoping each trip between home and work would be safe. In that chaos, I found an unexpected path: HR. That survival instinct carried me into dentistry and HR, where I discovered communication's true power.



## “Leadership needs **balance**. Moderation brings clarity; excellence — not perfection — lasts.”

What started as a necessity became my training ground. Negotiating workplace dynamics, resolving conflicts and leading teams taught me that technical skill alone doesn't define great dentistry. Communication does. A well-placed word can turn a patient's fear into trust or a team's tension into unity. That's the foundation I've built my leadership on.

### Leadership is about perspective, not just decisions

My journey took me from Baghdad to San Diego, into roles that demanded I navigate leadership from every angle. Working across diverse environments showed me a truth: Leadership isn't just managing people; it's managing perspectives.

The strategies that worked in one clinic had to adapt in another. Great leaders don't just decide. They read the room, adjust their message and guide with clarity. Now, as a dentist, director and mentor, I see this daily. Every tough talk — calming a nervous patient, supporting a struggling colleague or rallying a team — is a test of how well we seize the moment.

### Why difficult conversations go wrong

Before we fix them, let's see why they fail. I've spotted these patterns across years and cultures:

#### 1. The blame trap: “You blew it” versus “Let's fix it”

A patient once flared up over a billing issue — not the cost, but feeling cornered. Fix it: Shift from blame to contribution. Instead of, “This keeps happening,” try, “How can we make this work better?”

#### 2. Emotion overpowers the goal

I've seen teammates bicker over schedules while patients wait. Fix it: Pause. Am I reacting or leading? Try: “I hear you — let's figure this out together.”

#### 3. Defensiveness over focus

Minor gripes can drown out big needs when we “win” instead of understand. Fix it: Acknowledge first. Try: “I see why you feel that way. Let's talk about what we both need.”

### My blueprint: 6 steps to lead with grit and grace

I've refined these steps over a decade. Here's what works:

1. Know your goal: What are you really after?
2. Start with respect: Judgment shuts doors; respect opens them.
3. Stay cool: Tension rises; I don't.
4. Lean on facts: Opinions blur; data clarifies.
5. Use “I” statements: “I see this — where do you stand?”
6. Move forward together: Solutions stick when we build them.

### When emotions surge: The STATE framework

For high-stakes moments — an upset patient, a frustrated teammate — I rely on a tool that stuck with me from my HR training. Using the book “Crucial Conversations” as a guide and shaped by my own experience in dentistry, I use this STATE framework to keep steady when emotions flare:

- **Share the basics:** “The plan changed.”
- **Tell your take:** “That's probably the obstacle, not you.”
- **Ask their view:** “What's this like for you?”
- **Talk tentatively:** “I might be wrong, but maybe...”
- **Encourage problem-solving:** “Could a shift help?”

### A final word: Conversations aren't walls — they're doors

Leadership needs balance. Moderation brings clarity; excellence — not perfection — lasts. When talks get tough, I ask: Am I solving or venting? Listening or waiting? Making space for truth?

I've seen resilience shine, from Baghdad's enduring spirit to California's clinics. Difficult conversations aren't barriers; they're keys to progress. Shape them right, and your work, your people and your purpose stand tall. For new dentists, this is how we don't just lead — we inspire. Try these steps in your next tough talk. What works for you? Let's shape dentistry's future together.

This article originally appeared March 28, 2025 in the ADA New Dentist Now blog, [newdentistblog.ada.org](https://newdentistblog.ada.org)

Muhlab Al Sammarraie, D.D.S., originally from Baghdad, is a site dental director at AltaMed Health Services in the Los Angeles area, the nation's largest federally qualified health center. Recognized as a 2023 ADA 10 Under 10 Award winner and an Incisal Edge magazine 40 Under 40 Top Dentist in America for 2023, he serves as an international lecturer at Universidad De La Salle Bajio and a preceptor for Tufts University School of Dental Medicine students. Dr. Al Sammarraie is also a member of the ADA House of Delegates and the 2024-26 ADA Leadership Institutes. Beyond clinic walls, he champions dental access for underserved communities and advocates for policies that strengthen the role of FQHCs in preventive care, extending his efforts to support displaced Iraqis.



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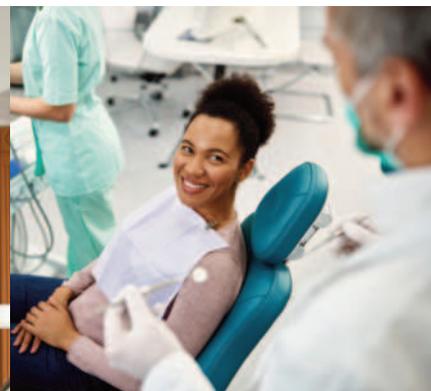
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