

Celebrating
1 year of Dente Magazine

DENTE



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DENTE

Dear Readers,

On October 18, 2023, I made a decision that would change my life. It was a time when I felt disconnected from the path I was on, longing for something more meaningful. That longing led me to Dente. I didn't know how far this journey would take me, but I knew I had found something worth pursuing.

One year later, I can say without hesitation that Dente has been one of the most fulfilling challenges of my life. It hasn't always been easy, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. The privilege of telling your stories, amplifying voices from every corner of the dental world, and sharing insights that inspire has been a gift I deeply cherish.

This issue is special—it's a celebration of the incredible women who have allowed me to showcase their journeys.

To **Dana Yumul**, thank you for trusting me and this fledgling publication with your story. You were the first, and your courage and openness were the launching pad for everything that followed.

To **Chantal Richards**, your insights as a clinician from Jamaica and your dedication to working with autistic patients have been profoundly impactful. Thank you for shining a light on this vital area of care.

Dr. Tina Saw, thank you for sharing Oral Genome with me. Watching it grow and pave the way for innovation has been incredible. Your vision is nothing short of trailblazing.

Carina Lovestad, your book and your dedication as both a clinician and a mother have shifted perspectives in our industry. Thank you for inspiring us all.

Dr. Andrea Basualdo, your expertise and passion have been a gift to this publication. You never fail to introduce fresh, essential topics that elevate the conversation.

To **Shelbey Arevelo**, your entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to educating professionals about billing are nothing short of inspirational. You've shown what it means to take charge and lead.

Kari Carter-Cherelus, thank you for teaching me about burnout in dentistry—a topic I hadn't fully considered but have since felt the weight of during this journey. Your dedication to educating others is sobering and inspiring.

Dr. Amanda Hoffmeister, your advocacy for sustainable dentistry has opened our eyes to a critical issue. Your work has made an indelible mark on the field.

Dr. Melanie Silvestrini, you've set the gold standard for personal branding in dentistry, elevating the profession and inspiring others to follow suit.

Dr. Ashley Fagan, your commitment to creating peaceful dental environments and uplifting your community is a beacon of hope. Thank you for leading by example.

And **Katrina Sanders**, your energy, expertise, and positivity are unparalleled. You've been a bright light in dental hygiene, and the field is better for it.

This year has been full of growth and lessons, and I'm so grateful for all of you who've been a part of this journey. As we step into year two, I plan to take a moment to reflect and refine how we bring you the stories that matter most.

Thank you for an incredible year. Here's to another filled with inspiration, growth, and shared stories.

Your Story Matters.



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MOBILE SMILES
Dana Yumul, RDHAP EF II



Dana Yumul, an experienced dental hygienist, has embarked on a fulfilling adventure as a mobile dental hygienist, driven by a desire to make dental care more accessible, especially for those facing physical challenges. Inspired by her own family's struggles with health issues, Dana has found her calling in providing dental care directly to patients' homes, improving their quality of life while maintaining high standards of care.

Bringing Convenience and Comfort to Your Doorstep

Mobile dental hygiene services offer unparalleled convenience and comfort. Patients receive care in the familiar surroundings of their own homes, reducing anxiety and ensuring accessibility. This not only saves families time and money but also provides a more flexible scheduling option, allowing for more extensive care than traditional dental offices often allow.

A Day in the Life of a Mobile Dental Hygienist

Dana's typical day involves meticulous planning, ensuring she has all the necessary equipment, and traveling to patients' locations. Good planning is key to providing quality care on the go, ensuring that patients receive the same level of care as they would in a traditional office.

Expanding Access to Care

One of the core benefits of mobile dental hygiene is its ability to reach a diverse range of people. Whether it's individuals with mobility issues, busy schedules, or dental anxiety, Dana's services make oral care accessible to those who may have otherwise struggled to access it.

Maintaining Sterilization Standards

Maintaining high sterilization standards is a top priority for Dana. She carries portable equipment and follows strict protocols to ensure the safety of her patients. Having a designated space for a sterilization center at home, including advanced equipment and regular spore testing, ensures that every patient is treated in a clean and safe environment.

Addressing Challenges and Creating Awareness

One of the challenges Dana faces is gaining access to people in need, especially in understaffed nursing homes. Creating awareness about mobile dental services is an ongoing goal. Dana addresses issues such as gum disease and cavities through thorough cleanings, education on preventive measures, and by providing comprehensive reports to families while referring patients to a dentist when necessary.

Heartwarming Moments and Smiles Restored

Dana has had heartwarming experiences with elderly patients who find relief in her services. One memorable moment involved a patient regaining her smile after years of neglect. Dana's care and collaboration with a dentist resulted in a completed smile and restorative work, bringing immense joy to her patient.

Staying Updated and Educating Patients

Staying updated with the latest advancements is vital for Dana. She attends dental conferences, takes online courses, and networks with colleagues to provide the best care possible. Education is a key part of her service, as she provides personalized oral hygiene tips and recommends products to help patients maintain good oral health between visits.



Embracing Challenges and Building Trust

For aspiring mobile dental hygienists, Dana encourages embracing the challenges and enjoying the flexibility this profession offers. Building trust with patients is crucial for success, and it's a rewarding journey.

Handling Emergencies and the Role of Telehealth

Handling emergencies is part of Dana's job, and she has a network of dental professionals for referrals and immediate relief for certain issues. She also recognizes the importance of telehealth, which can complement mobile services by offering consultations, advice, and follow-up care remotely, enhancing the overall patient experience.

A Bright Future Ahead

Dana envisions a bright future for mobile dental hygiene, with more integration of technology, such as portable diagnostic tools, and increased collaboration with traditional dental practices. This evolution promises even better access to oral care for all.

Making a Positive Impact

Dana's personal fulfillment comes from knowing she's improving oral health access and making a positive impact on communities. Her goal is clear: in a year from now, she hopes every nursing home in California will know that hygienists can improve their residents' lives, one smile at a time.

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AUTISM X DENTAL HEALTH
CHANTAL RICHARDS, RDH

Spectrum-Focused Dental Care **Carl Demadema, BOHSc**

In the world of healthcare, every individual deserves access to quality care, regardless of their unique challenges. For those on the autism spectrum, a routine dental visit can be a daunting experience. Enter Chantal Richards, a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Certified Autism Specialist, who is on a mission to bridge the gap between dental care and autism. In this exclusive interview, Chantal shares her qualifications, experiences, and strategies for providing autism-friendly dental care.

1. A Journey of Dedication and Expertise:

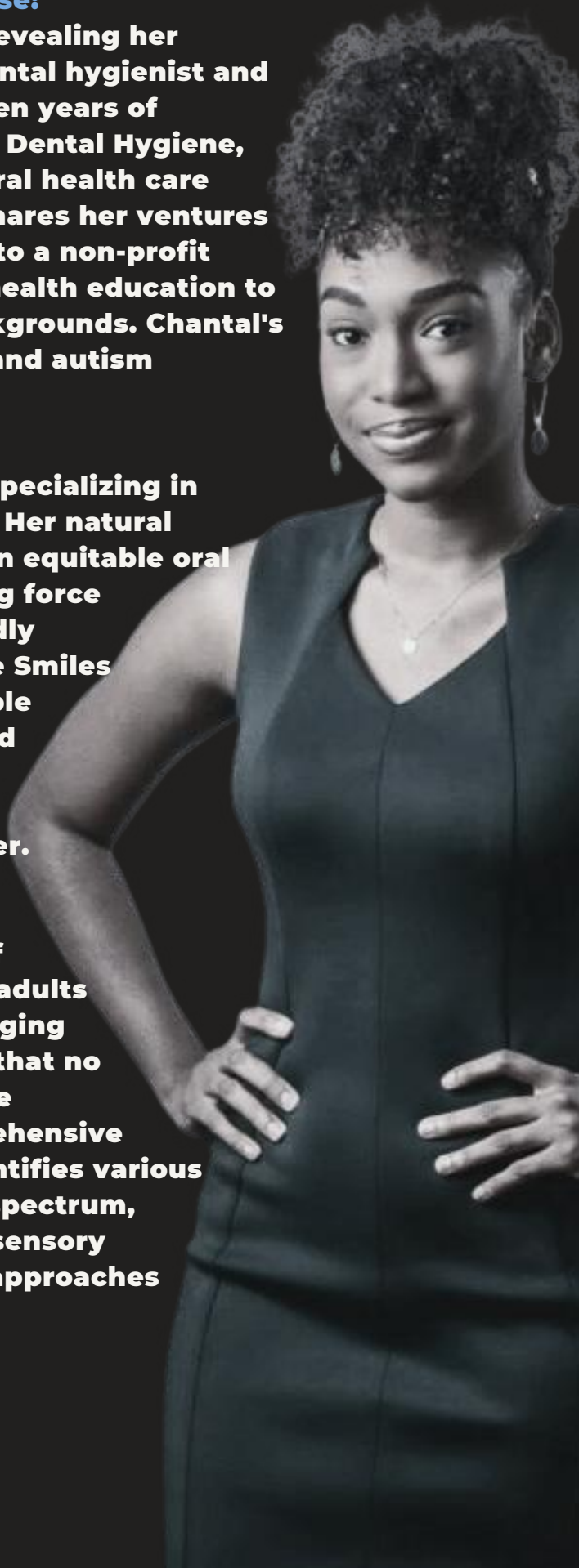
Chantal Richards introduces herself, revealing her background and qualifications as a dental hygienist and a certified autism specialist. With seven years of experience and a Bachelor's degree in Dental Hygiene, Chantal's commitment to improving oral health care extends beyond her profession. She shares her ventures into radio hosting and her dedication to a non-profit organization aimed at providing oral health education to children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Chantal's journey into the world of dental care and autism advocacy is truly inspiring.

2. Passion Meets Purpose:

Chantal discusses her inspiration for specializing in working with individuals with autism. Her natural passion for helping others and belief in equitable oral care for everyone served as the driving force behind her dedication to autism-friendly dentistry. Chantal's dental office, Pure Smiles Jamaica, sought to create a comfortable environment for both ASD patients and their caregivers, leading to additional training and specialization in treating patients with autism spectrum disorder.

3. Tailoring Care to Unique Needs:

Chantal emphasizes the importance of adapting dental care for children and adults with autism, considering the wide-ranging nature of the condition. Recognizing that no two individuals with ASD are alike, she underscores the necessity of a comprehensive screening process. This screening identifies various factors, such as their position on the spectrum, verbal or non-verbal communication, sensory triggers, and more, enabling tailored approaches for each patient.





4. Building Trust Through Effective Communication

Effective communication is crucial when working with autistic patients. Chantal shares strategies for establishing trust with ASD patients during dental appointments, including gathering information on their preferences and creating a comfortable environment. She highlights the significance of gradual exposure to the dental practice and building a sense of familiarity to reduce anxiety.

5. Navigating Sensory Sensitivities

Chantal addresses the common sensory sensitivities among people with autism and provides insights into accommodating these sensitivities in dental practice. She emphasizes the importance of patience, trial and error, and close attention to the patient's reactions during the procedure to ensure their comfort and success.

6. Real-Life Challenges and Successes

Chantal shares a challenging case involving an autistic patient who refused to enter the treatment room. She describes how creativity and flexibility were essential in addressing the patient's needs, highlighting the importance of meeting the patient where they are and gradually building trust.

7. Collaborative Care

Collaboration with healthcare professionals and caregivers is essential when working with individuals with autism. Chantal elaborates on her coordination efforts and information sharing to provide comprehensive support for her patients, ensuring they receive the best care.

8. Adapting Sensory Aspects of Dental Care

Chantal discusses how she adapts the sensory aspects of dental hygiene to meet the preferences and sensitivities of her autistic patients. She emphasizes the importance of trial and error, documentation of patient preferences, and the use of the TELL-SHOW-DO method to create a comfortable experience.

9. Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Care

Chantal explains how a dental professional can ensure that their practice is culturally sensitive and inclusive while providing specialized care for autistic individuals. She emphasizes the need for staff training and communication to prepare for patients with special needs effectively.

10. Parental Involvement in Dental Health

Chantal highlights the importance of educating and involving parents or guardians in maintaining their child's dental health. She customizes oral hygiene instructions based on the challenges faced by parents and caregivers, providing specific recommendations and sending information after appointments.

11. Innovative Techniques and Technologies

While Chantal acknowledges that she works in a developing country with limited access to cutting-edge technology, she mentions innovative techniques and technologies that enhance the dental care experience for autistic individuals. These include virtual reality, aromatherapy, sedation dentistry, augmented reality, and behavior management software.

12. Staying Informed and Continuously Learning

Continuous learning is vital in healthcare, and Chantal discusses her methods for staying informed about the latest developments in dental hygiene and autism-related care. She emphasizes the value of attending conferences, participating in webinars, and conducting credible and current research.

13. Challenges and Rewards

Chantal reflects on the most significant challenges and rewards associated with her dual roles as a dental hygienist and a certified autism specialist. She shares the emotional challenges of referring uncooperative patients but also the immense satisfaction of successfully treating and building trust with patients on the autism spectrum.

14. Aspiring for Change

In conclusion, Chantal offers advice to aspiring dental hygienists interested in specializing in autism care within the dental field. Her message is clear: if you have a passion for helping others, a dedication to creating change, and a commitment to providing mental and physical support, this field is a phenomenal avenue to explore.

Chantal Richards exemplifies the transformative power of dedication and compassion in the world of autism-friendly dental care. Her insights and experiences serve as a guiding light for dental professionals and advocates striving to make a difference in the lives of those with autism spectrum disorder.





THE HIDDEN HAZARD: NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS IN DENTISTRY

As a dental hygienist and dental assistant with eight years of experience, I've spent countless hours working in a noisy environment, from the whirl of drills to the high-pitched squeal of ultrasonic scalers to the high intensity screams of children. While I've always been aware of the potential risks and occupational hazards associated with my profession, it wasn't until I started experiencing symptoms of hearing loss that I truly understood the dangers of noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL).

NIHL is a preventable condition caused by prolonged exposure to loud sounds. For dental professionals, the constant exposure to high-pitched noises from dental equipment can be particularly damaging to our hearing. Over time, this exposure can lead to a gradual loss of hearing, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and even hyperacusis (extreme sensitivity to sound).

The Dangers of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

NIHL can have a significant impact on both our personal and professional lives. Hearing loss can make it difficult to communicate with patients, understand instructions from colleagues, and even detect subtle changes in sounds that may indicate a dental problem. It can also lead to feelings of frustration and anxiety.

Long or repeated exposure to sounds at or above 85 dBA can cause hearing loss. According to the American Dental Association, dental professionals are exposed to the noise of handpieces and ultrasonic scalers, at levels of 60-99 decibels. You do the maths, the majority of us work a minimum of 8 hour duty days for 3-7 days per week. That's A LOT of hours of exposure to these high frequency sounds. It is very important for me to note that exposure to these high frequency sounds in the dental office is next to unavoidable, however, there are ways to reduce your risk of NIHL.



Protecting Your Hearing

Fortunately, there are steps we can take to protect our hearing from the harmful effects of noise exposure. One of the most important things we can do is to wear appropriate ear protection. This includes earplugs, earmuffs, or custom-made earplugs.

When choosing ear protection, it's important to consider the noise level of the environment you're working in. For example, if you're working with a high-powered dental drill, you may need to wear earmuffs in addition to earplugs.

It's also important to take breaks from noisy environments whenever possible as this can help to reduce the overall noise exposure to your ears.

Signs and Symptoms of Hearing Loss

If you're concerned about your hearing, it's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of NIHL.

These may include:

- Difficulty hearing in noisy environments
- Ringing or buzzing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Muffled or distorted hearing
- Sensitivity to sound (hyperacusis)

If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to see a healthcare professional for a hearing test.

Personal Experience

I recently started experiencing symptoms of hearing loss, including tinnitus and difficulty hearing in noisy environments. After seeing an ENT specialist, who then referred me for further testing at an audiologist, it was recommended that I wear ear protection. I am still in the process of working through that but it was definitely a wakeup call. My major concern regarding ear protection was my potential inability to communicate with my patients, however, the audiologist gave me a wide variety of ear protection to choose from. I finally decided on one that has a filter that would block all high frequency sounds but I would still be able to hear everything around me. It was a hard pill to swallow for me and I tried everything in my power to not be angry with the profession because I felt like this is yet another hazard that we have to deal with on a daily basis. I am extremely grateful that there is a solution and I am making it my duty to raise as much awareness as possible.

Noise-induced hearing loss is a serious problem that can have a significant impact on our lives. As dental professionals, we are at a particular risk for NIHL due to the constant exposure to loud noises. It is our duty to our bodies to not ignore signs of potential harm and danger. It is my hope to have a long and healthy career and I am sure we share the same sentiments.

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CEO OF ORAL GENOME
TINA SAW, DDS

FEATURE

ORAL GENOME

In the realm of oral health innovation, Oral Genome has emerged as a pioneering force, offering a revolutionary saliva test designed to transform preventive oral healthcare. I had the opportunity to delve into the depths of this groundbreaking technology and gain insights from the CEO of Oral Genome, Tina Saw. Here's an extensive overview that encapsulates our conversation, shedding light on the myriad aspects of Oral Genome's game-changing saliva test.



Unveiling Oral Genome and Its Innovative Saliva Test

Oral Genome stands at the forefront of dental innovation, boasting an ingenious saliva test that swiftly assesses an individual's susceptibility to caries, periodontal disease, and diabetes. Tina Saw elucidated that the test yields comprehensive results within a mere 15 minutes, either administered chairside or conveniently at home.

Technology & Methodology: Pioneering Adaptive Learning in Oral Health Assessment

Employing cutting-edge AI and computer vision, Oral Genome orchestrates a meticulous analysis of saliva samples. By scrutinizing a set of biomarkers pertinent to caries, periodontal disease, and diabetes, the test's models deftly detect specific biomarker quantities within the oral cavity.

Crafting Customized Preventive Oral Healthcare Plans

Saw highlighted the pivotal role played by the test results in crafting bespoke preventive oral healthcare plans. This meticulous process involves identifying biomarkers indicative of oral health risks. Drawing a parallel with skincare routines, Saw elucidated that tailoring the preventive plan is about achieving balance and precision, honing in on specific risk factors identified through analysis.



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Key Components & Significance of Personalized Plans

The personalized plans crafted by Oral Genome encapsulate a multifaceted approach. From dietary and product recommendations to behavioral guidance and risk mitigation strategies, each component is meticulously designed to address individual needs and contribute holistically to maintaining optimal oral health.



Ensuring Accuracy, Reliability, and User-Friendliness

Safeguarding the accuracy and reliability of test results, Oral Genome conducts rigorous evaluations involving both artificial saliva and clinical data correlation studies. Moreover, the user-friendly nature of the saliva test, embedded within a mobile app interface, ensures a seamless experience from sample collection to receiving the personalized healthcare plan.

Data Privacy & Security: Upholding Confidentiality with Vigilance

With a commitment to user privacy, Oral Genome employs encryption protocols, strictly controls access to user data, and complies with stringent data protection regulations like HIPAA. Transparent data practices and proactive educational initiatives further underscore their dedication to safeguarding user information.

Integration with Healthcare Providers : Facilitating Seamless Integration

While integration into mainstream healthcare practices is a work in progress, Oral Genome allows healthcare providers to incorporate test reports directly into Electronic Health Record systems. This bridging step aims to facilitate comprehensive patient care by seamlessly integrating the findings from the saliva test.



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Driving Future Research & Development

The company's commitment to ongoing research and development manifests in its continuous efforts to enhance the saliva test's technology. Their focus revolves around measuring a broader spectrum of biomarkers, ensuring the test remains at the forefront of personalized oral healthcare.

Impact on Global Oral Health & Community Engagement

Oral Genome envisions its saliva test as a catalyst for improving global oral health outcomes. By empowering individuals through early detection and personalized preventive measures, the test has the potential. The company actively engages with communities, advocating for oral health awareness through various initiatives and partnerships.

Empowering Users Through Education & Collaboration

A cornerstone of Oral Genome's approach is education. They equip users with a comprehensive understanding of their oral health by offering clear communication of results, personalized recommendations, educational resources, interactive platforms, and collaboration with healthcare providers.

In essence, Oral Genome's innovative saliva test heralds a new era in personalized oral healthcare. Through a harmonious blend of technology, precision, and user-centricity, it aspires to transform oral health management, one tailored plan at a time.

With its unwavering dedication to advancement and community engagement, Oral Genome stands poised to redefine the landscape of preventive oral healthcare globally.





Oral Genome: Harnessing Technology and AI to Build Value-Based Care Models

In an era where technology is reshaping the healthcare landscape, advancements in oral health diagnostics are driving significant changes toward preventive and patient-centered care. By integrating artificial intelligence (AI), saliva-based testing, and advanced data analytics, companies like Oral Genome are helping to shift oral healthcare from reactive treatment to proactive prevention, all while emphasizing value-based care models. This approach benefits both patients and providers by focusing on long-term health outcomes rather than short-term interventions, aiming to improve patient well-being and reduce overall healthcare costs.

The Role of Technology in Oral Health

Historically, dental care has been treated separately from broader healthcare services. However, modern research has established a strong connection between oral health and systemic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and even certain cancers. Despite these findings, oral health continues to be largely reactive, addressing issues only after they arise instead of focusing on prevention.

Saliva-based testing, coupled with AI diagnostics, is transforming how dental care is delivered. These technologies enable early detection of conditions such as caries, periodontal disease, and even certain systemic illnesses. By identifying potential health risks early, providers can take preventive measures that avoid more severe health complications down the line.

Furthermore, saliva-based tests can be administered both in-office and at home, making diagnostics more accessible and convenient for patients. With the integration of AI, results are processed in real time, delivering insights to both patients and their healthcare providers in under 15 minutes, enabling timely interventions and improved outcomes.

Artificial Intelligence and Precision Diagnostics

AI plays a critical role in enhancing the precision and effectiveness of these diagnostic tools. Oral Genome's use of computer vision algorithms allows for the analysis of saliva samples with high accuracy, offering over 90% sensitivity and specificity in detecting diseases. This precision reduces the risk of false positives and negatives, resulting in more reliable diagnostics and better-informed treatment plans.

Through AI-driven mobile apps, patients can receive detailed health reports that they can share with their healthcare providers. The AI continuously learns from a growing database of test results, refining its ability to identify patterns, predict future health risks, and offer tailored recommendations.

This real-time access to diagnostic information fosters greater patient engagement. Patients no longer need to wait for lab results or rely solely on annual checkups. Instead, they can monitor their oral health regularly, taking proactive steps to maintain it. This aligns with value-based care models, where preventive measures and positive health outcomes are prioritized over the volume of treatments.

Building Value-Based Care Models

Value-based care has emerged as a transformative approach in healthcare, focusing on improving patient outcomes while managing costs. In this model, healthcare providers are incentivized to prioritize the quality of care over the quantity of services rendered. Rather than being compensated for procedures, providers are rewarded for keeping patients healthy and reducing the need for expensive interventions.



Saliva-based diagnostics fit seamlessly into this model. By providing early and actionable insights into a patient's oral health, these tests help reduce the need for costly treatments such as surgeries or other invasive procedures. This preventive focus not only improves patients' quality of life but also contributes to a more efficient healthcare system that reduces unnecessary expenditures.

The data generated from saliva-based tests is invaluable for developing personalized care plans. AI-driven insights allow healthcare providers to tailor their treatments to each patient's unique needs, addressing current conditions while anticipating future risks. This personalized approach is key to value-based care, where the goal is to provide the right care at the right time.

Bringing Together Oral and Medical Health Data

As the healthcare industry moves toward more integrated care models, there is growing recognition of the importance of linking oral and systemic health. Insurance companies and healthcare providers are increasingly focused on creating comprehensive care plans that consider both oral and medical data. This integration enables a more complete view of a patient's overall health, facilitating better coordination of care across disciplines.

Insurance providers, in particular, are exploring how saliva-based testing and the data it generates can play a role in these integrated models. By incorporating oral health data into larger health systems, insurers can offer more personalized and effective care plans. These efforts are part of a broader movement toward value-based insurance design, where the focus is on improving patient outcomes while controlling costs through preventive care.

As more insurers recognize the connection between oral health and overall wellness, they are looking to include saliva-based tests as part of broader health initiatives. Oral Genome's technology allows for the mapping of dental and saliva data into healthcare systems, creating a unified platform that supports value-based care. This not only helps reduce healthcare costs but also ensures patients receive the right interventions before conditions worsen.

The Future of Oral Health

As AI and saliva-based diagnostics continue to evolve, the future of oral healthcare looks increasingly integrated with general health systems. With high accuracy in disease detection, fast result delivery, and growing partnerships with insurance companies, saliva-based testing is poised to set new standards for how oral health is managed in the context of overall wellness.

In the coming years, the integration of oral and medical health data will likely become the norm, with insurers and healthcare providers working together to build more comprehensive, value-based care models. AI and data-driven insights will continue to play a critical role, offering more powerful tools for patients and providers alike to monitor, manage, and improve health outcomes.

By focusing on prevention, early detection, and personalized care, saliva-based diagnostics are not only improving oral health but also contributing to a more sustainable and patient-centered healthcare system. As value-based care becomes more widespread, these technological advancements will be central to shaping the future of healthcare.

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JAN
'24



AUTHOR OF SMA BISSER

Carina Vesterlund Løvstad

Små Bisser: **Nurturing Healthy Habits for** **Your Little Ones**

In the realm of dental care for toddlers and young children, Carina Løvstad stands as a beacon of innovation, education, and compassionate care. As a dental hygienist and the mastermind behind 'Små Bisser' (translated as 'Little Teeth'), Carina has spearheaded a movement to revolutionize how parents approach and nurture their children's oral hygiene.

The crux of her contribution lies in a captivating book titled 'Små Bisser: A book to make tooth brushing fun!' This literary gem is more than just a guide—it's a handbook that encapsulates everything essential about dental care for children aged 0-5. With an emphasis on play, learning, and accessibility, Carina decodes the toothbrushing process in a manner that resonates directly with parents' concerns and queries.





Early Influences and Inspirations

Carina's journey into the world of dental hygiene is rooted in her childhood experiences. Visiting the children's dental care clinic was a cherished affair—a safe, pleasant space where the staff exuded warmth and friendliness. These encounters left an indelible mark on her, planting the seeds of a future where she could replicate those positive experiences for other children.

Her interest burgeoned during orthodontic treatment at 13, sparking fascination with the transformative potential of dental care. This, combined with the vibrant atmosphere of dental clinics, fueled her desire to venture into the field professionally.

Pivotal Moments and Specializations

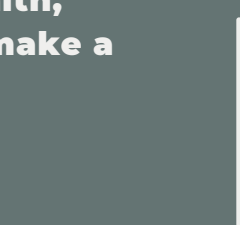
Driven by a deep-rooted fascination for improving lives through behavioral change, Carina's dental hygienist journey was characterized by a passion for pediatric dentistry. Her studies honed her focus on health education, psychology, and communication—skills she expertly channels today in her book and clinical practice.

The revelation of the dental hygienist profession became a pivotal turning point, revealing a path unexplored but perfectly aligned with her interests. From Danish public school to university, her educational journey laid the foundation for a career dedicated to transforming dental care perceptions.

Professional Milestones and Shaping Perspectives

Her career path wasn't without challenges. Despite her intrinsic interest in communication and teaching, she observed a lack of emphasis on these aspects within various positions. This realization spurred her to advocate for oral health education within schools, a cause she championed in her early employment with children's dental care in Copenhagen.

However, Carina's passion extends beyond borders. Her involvement with 'Dental Health Without Borders' illuminated the transformative power of dental education in underprivileged countries. The correlation between improved oral health, education, and future opportunities fueled her drive to make a broader impact.





"Making dental care a joyous moment! Here, I'm assisting a young one with tooth brushing, ensuring a steady and positive experience for both child and adult. Agreement and gentle support make this routine a happy and effective one."



Passion for Children's Oral Health and Overcoming Challenges


As a mother herself, Carina recognized the dearth of early childhood dental hygiene support within Denmark's healthcare system. This realization birthed 'Små Bisser' on Instagram—a platform that offered advice, shared personal anecdotes, and engaged families in the discourse around dental hygiene for young children.

Challenges surfaced, primarily centered around the struggle many parents faced with toothbrushing their young children. Carina aimed to redefine this narrative, emphasizing the importance of making dental care a natural, enjoyable routine in a child's life.

Creating a Dental Hygiene Book

The genesis of her book stemmed from an incident where she overheard a mother contemplating skipping tooth brushing due to her child's resistance. This starkly contrasted Carina's belief—a conviction that skipping dental care was a more significant intrusion than the minor protests during brushing.

Formulating the book's content became a delicate dance between academic knowledge and accessible language. Carina meticulously crafted the narrative, ensuring it catered to diverse educational backgrounds, avoiding a condescending tone, and offering practical guidance.





Cultural Influence and Personal Touch

Denmark's healthcare system, although strong in school dental care, still faced challenges related to children's diets impacting oral health. Carina addressed this in her book, underscoring the effects of dietary changes and the need for mental health considerations during toothbrushing.

Her personal anecdotes and those gathered from various families rendered the book relatable and credible, infusing it with real-life experiences that resonated deeply with readers.

Impact and Future Vision

The impact of Carina's book reverberates through heartwarming testimonials from readers whose toothbrushing experiences transformed positively after implementing the book's techniques. Carina's overarching goal is to make dental care more accessible and enjoyable for families across Denmark.

Future aspirations include expanding her educational efforts through collaborations, educational materials for global projects, and continued engagement through her Instagram platform.

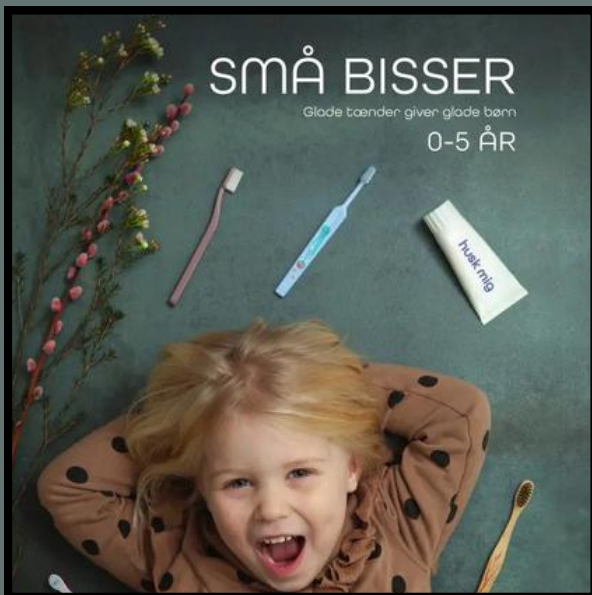


Challenges, Achievements, and Advice

Navigating the path of self-publishing was fraught with challenges, from book misprints to the uphill task of gaining recognition without the backing of a major publisher. Yet, Carina's persistence prevailed, leading to successful placements in Danish libraries and impactful collaborations.

Her advice to aspiring dental hygienists echoes the essence of commitment, curiosity, and genuine care for people. Engaging with children and parents with optimism and dedication lies at the heart of fostering a positive attitude toward oral hygiene.

Carina's journey exemplifies the transformative power of passion, dedication, and a genuine desire to effect positive change in children's oral health. Through her book, 'Små Bisser,' she has catalyzed a paradigm shift, making dental care for toddlers not just a routine but a joyful, integral part of family life in Denmark and beyond.



CHECK IT OUT





A Mini Guide: The Use of Retention and Positioning as Part of Toothbrushing

In May 2024, the book *Små Bisser*, in English *Tiny Teeth*, by Danish dental hygienist Carina Løvstad, was released. The book is published by the oldest professional publisher in Denmark, Gads Forlag. It targets parents with children of all ages, offering guidance on starting tooth brushing, along with knowledge about dental health for older children as well. Carina works as a full-time clinician with children in a Danish school clinic.

Dental care is crucial for overall health in both adults and children. Poor oral hygiene can lead to other health issues, which is why the importance of good dental care for young children should be a focus for dental professionals. Many parents struggle with brushing their toddlers' teeth and may wonder if they are doing it thoroughly enough. As dental professionals, you can assist these parents, and in this article, I will share some advice from the book and insights I provide daily to help parents make tooth brushing thorough and enjoyable for their children.

Before recommending retention techniques for parents of young children during tooth brushing, I always suggest starting with a playful approach and gradual familiarization with dental care. Here's a brief overview of some of my recommendations.

1. Early introduction to dental care

Dental care should be introduced early, alongside other routines that promote the child's well-being. This helps prevent issues and fosters a routine instead of a battle. Parents should introduce an ultra-soft toothbrush when the child is three months old, gently brushing their gums and tongue. Toddlers can already recognize routines at this age, making good habits around tooth brushing just as important as other personal hygiene practices.

2. Try different toothpastes

Some children may struggle to get used to the taste of toothpaste. It's beneficial to use toothpaste that is mild in flavor and has little to no foaming agent. For example, a child or junior toothpaste designed specifically for younger, more sensitive children can help. It may take time to find the right flavor, so encourage parents to let their children try different options. A strong-tasting toothpaste can lead to protests during brushing.

3. Brush together

One of the most important things to know is that your child mirrors you! If you, as a parent, show that this is important to you, it will automatically become important to your child. Therefore, when brushing teeth, parents should also brush together with their child. Since children are often put to bed before parents, they may not see that tooth brushing is also a ritual for adults.

It's a good idea for parents to brush their own teeth in front of their child daily, sparking curiosity and creating a shared experience that lays the foundation for good routines.

4. Brush in front of the mirror

Some children may benefit from brushing in front of a mirror, as they might find it hard to relate to what they cannot see. When the child can sit in your lap, it's helpful for them to see what you are actually doing in their mouth while brushing. As mentioned earlier, allowing the child to become familiar with the toothbrush early on is essential. But it's also crucial for them to understand what the toothbrush does in their mouth.

5. Plaque dental disclosing tablets

Plaque dental disclosing tablets is something I recommend often for parents with slightly older children. They make brushing fun and show whether teeth are being brushed clean. If you are unfamiliar with them, the tablets reveal the bacteria on teeth that have not been removed during brushing. Colored tablets are a great help for parents to discover overlooked areas in the mouth.

If parents struggle to achieve effective tooth brushing and dental care voluntarily at home, I recommend the following, which is also an excerpt from my book *Tiny Teeth*.

Chapter 7 - Retaining the Child

Many families are concerned about using retention during tooth brushing, even though they know that good oral and dental care is vital for their child's health and well-being. In this chapter, I will describe how both voluntary and involuntary retention can be carried out with the utmost respect for both the child and the parent or caregiver.

Positioning and Distraction

Positioning and distraction are two important tools that can be used to avoid the need for retention. Distractions can include inactive tooth brushing, fun brushing positions, and various routines, such as singing a tooth brushing song or telling a story during brushing to divert the child's focus away from the actual brushing.

Positioning also refers to the physical stance used to perform a task better, helping the child. In this context, the goal is to make tooth brushing pleasant for both the child and the adults. When it comes to retention, positioning can serve as a tool for parents to ensure their child's comfort during retention and provide a better working environment for themselves.

When positioning, consider the child's age, cognitive abilities, and physical skills. For a child under one year, you might swaddle them in a blanket while brushing their teeth. Alternatively, letting the child sit in a wrap, skin-to-skin with a parent, keeps their arms and legs calm in a gentle and comfortable way.

A larger child, from one year and older, can sit on a parent's lap, benefiting from that closeness. It's also possible to create a calming environment for tooth brushing by brushing while lying in bed. You can lie down with your child and arrange things so you have a cup next to the bed for the child to spit into. Many children appreciate having good support for their head while brushing. If the child feels like they are losing balance or not standing securely, it can make brushing less pleasant, making it difficult for parents to manage both the toothbrush and their view.

Parents should establish rules together that both can agree upon, discussing how far they are willing to go before resorting to involuntary retention. You and your partner know your child and their limits best.

Parents should collaboratively establish some rules that both can stand by, agreeing on how far they are willing to go before using involuntary retention on their child. This book presents several methods and suggestions on how to avoid retention. These methods and suggestions do not have to lead to thorough tooth brushing without coercion in your home, as you know the child best.

If the child still refuses to have their teeth brushed after trying both distraction and positioning, involuntary retention at home may become necessary. This means retaining the child against their will in order to carry out tooth brushing. It's possible that the child will respond with crying and physical resistance. Some children will soon learn that involuntary retention is used for a very short period, after which it stops, and they will accept it after a shorter or longer period.

However, involuntary retention may become necessary, as oral and dental care must be performed even if the child refuses. Skipping tooth brushing is not helpful, as it will adversely affect the child's well-being and physical health. I encourage that involuntary retention should only be used as a last resort and that parents should try their best to get the child to cooperate voluntarily.

Gentle and Voluntary Retention

Very young children may benefit from gentle retention if they cannot sit up by themselves or have difficulty keeping their head still. An example of gentle retention could be swaddling a small baby in a blanket while tooth brushing is performed.

For slightly older children, around two years old, they can be gently held by tucking them in bed and holding them close while brushing their teeth. Alternatively, parents can sit face-to-face with the child and hug them while the other parent brushes their teeth. This way, they can provide comfort and reassurance during the brushing process.

Voluntary retention means that you agree in advance with the child, particularly if they are older, using language they understand, that you will help keep their arms and legs still during tooth brushing. Explain to the child with a smile what you are doing and why, if they are old enough to grasp the context. This way, the child always knows what is happening. Some children find reassurance in the adult helping to keep their body still, making this brushing position recommended for children with excess energy or special needs. Counting during brushing can serve as a distraction, letting the child know how long brushing will last.

Involuntary Retention

Involuntary retention may be necessary if your child does not accept having their teeth brushed. Involuntary retention means that you must hold the child against their will to carry out the brushing. It's possible that your child will react with tears and physical resistance. Some children will learn after a short while that the involuntary retention is for a very brief period and will accept it after some time.

However, involuntary retention may be necessary, as oral and dental care must still be provided, even if the child refuses. Skipping brushing is not beneficial, as it will negatively affect the child's well-being and physical health. I encourage that involuntary retention only be used as a last option, with parents doing everything possible to get the child to cooperate voluntarily.

In Chapter 12 of the book: "Six Things to Know About Child Dental Care", dental hygienist Carina Løvstad also discusses how dental professionals can communicate the possibility of using retention in the clinic if necessary. The book includes several images that inspire positioning and distraction techniques. You can purchase the book at smaabisser.dk or in physical and online bookstores across the country in Denmark.

Carina Løvstad, Dental Hygienist, writer of the book *Små Bisser* 'Tiny Teeth'

For contact: smaabisser@gmail.com

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THE 2024 DENOBI AWARD ISSUE

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MODERN DENTISTRY

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Dentistry, Quality, Global Health Synergy
ANDREA BASUALDO, DDS

FEATURE ARTICLE

**DR. ANDREA
LORENA
BASUALDO
ALLENDE**

Dr. Andrea Lorena Basualdo Allende's journey in dentistry is a testament to her commitment to excellence, patient-centered care, and continuous improvement. With over 13 years of experience, her professional trajectory has been marked by key milestones that have shaped her into a leader in healthcare quality auditing, clinical dentistry, and healthcare management. In this article, we delve into her multifaceted expertise, her contributions to public health, her insights on digital health, and her aspirations for the future of dental care.





Professional Journey:

Dr. Basualdo Allende's journey began with a profound realization: dentistry isn't just about technical skills but also about providing quality care and ensuring a positive patient journey. Her experiences treating pregnant women and geriatric patients as part of the Chilean GES Oral Health program ignited her passion for improving dental care quality. She acknowledges the lack of emphasis on quality and person-centered care in her education but has since become a champion for change. Her internships at Harvard and Bupa Sanitas Clinics in Spain further honed her skills in management, user experience, and quality assurance.

Transitioning into her role as a Quality Auditor of Healthcare Institutions was a gradual process fueled by her observations of recurring management mistakes and their impact on patient outcomes. Dr. Basualdo Allende's background in clinical restorative restorations and endodontics uniquely positions her to understand the intricate nuances of dental care and contribute to healthcare auditing.

Multifaceted Expertise:

Her expertise in endodontics and clinical restorations allows her to take a holistic approach to patient care, ensuring seamless coordination between different specialties and improving treatment outcomes. She emphasizes the importance of clear communication among dental specialists and the need for shared decision-making with patients.

Dr. Basualdo Allende integrates her medical studies into her practice, prioritizing comprehensive patient assessments and considering the bidirectional relationship between oral and systemic health. She advocates for greater integration between dental and medical professionals to provide holistic patient care.

Healthcare Management and MBA Specialization:

Her training in health management and MBA specialization in health have been instrumental in shaping her approach to dentistry and quality auditing. Dr. Basualdo Allende emphasizes the importance of quality management in clinical settings, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of quality principles to effectively manage healthcare services.

She envisions a future where healthcare management is synonymous with quality care, emphasizing the role of technology in enhancing patient experiences and improving treatment outcomes.

Digital Health and Quality:

Dr. Basualdo Allende sees tremendous potential in digital health technologies such as teledentistry and AI for improving preventive care and treatment accuracy. She stresses the importance of digital health literacy and equitable access to technology for marginalized populations.

She believes that digital health plays a crucial role in ensuring patient-centered care and enhancing treatment effectiveness. By leveraging technology, healthcare providers can optimize workflows, reduce errors, and improve patient satisfaction.

Accreditation in Healthcare:

Dr. Basualdo Allende underscores the significance of accreditation in maintaining high standards of care and patient safety in dental settings. She highlights the importance of continuous quality improvement and teamwork in achieving and maintaining accreditation.

Accreditation not only ensures compliance with standards but also fosters a culture of excellence and accountability within healthcare institutions.



Global Perspective:

Her participation in clinical meetings at the European level has exposed her to best practices in dental care and quality auditing. Dr. Basualdo Allende emphasizes the importance of proactive prevention, effective communication, and interdisciplinary collaboration in delivering high-quality care.

Insights gained from international experiences have influenced her approach to quality auditing, leading to the adoption of innovative practices and continuous improvement initiatives.

Role in Public Health:

Dr. Basualdo Allende recognizes the critical role of oral health in overall public health and advocates for greater integration between dental and medical services. She emphasizes the importance of preventive care, lifestyle counseling, and early disease detection in promoting population health.

Dental professionals can contribute to public health initiatives by prioritizing preventive care, advocating for healthy lifestyle habits, and addressing systemic health concerns during dental consultations.

Language Proficiency and Cultural Awareness:

Her proficiency in multiple languages facilitates effective communication and cultural understanding within the healthcare community. Dr. Basualdo Allende emphasizes the importance of linguistic diversity in fostering trust and collaboration among healthcare professionals and patients.

Cultural awareness enhances healthcare management and auditing by promoting inclusive practices, effective communication, and patient-centered care.

Infections Associated with Healthcare:

Dr. Basualdo Allende's expertise in infection prevention informs her approach to ensuring a safe and sterile environment in dental care settings. She emphasizes the importance of hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, and sterilization protocols in preventing infections and ensuring patient safety.

By implementing rigorous infection control measures, dental professionals can mitigate the risk of healthcare-associated infections and maintain high standards of care.

Future Aspirations:

Looking ahead, Dr. Basualdo Allende aspires to work internationally in quality dental care management and contribute to advancements in dental care and healthcare quality. She envisions a future where dentistry embraces digital innovation, prioritizes preventive care, and integrates seamlessly with other healthcare services.

She advocates for greater attention to quality management in dentistry, increased collaboration between dental and medical professionals, and ongoing innovation in preventive care and treatment modalities.

In conclusion, Dr. Andrea Lorena Basualdo Allende's dedication to quality, innovation, and patient-centered care sets a high standard for dental professionals worldwide. Her multifaceted expertise, global perspective, and commitment to continuous improvement make her a trailblazer in the field of dental care and healthcare quality auditing. As dentistry continues to evolve, Dr. Basualdo Allende's insights and aspirations will undoubtedly shape the future of dental care and healthcare quality.



CREATING A JUST CULTURE: REVOLUTIONIZING PATIENT SAFETY IN DENTISTRY THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

One of the most significant challenges in enhancing patient safety within healthcare, including dentistry, is the underreporting of medical errors. Patient safety is defined as the minimization of unnecessary harm related to healthcare, but there is still no consensus on what constitutes a patient safety incident in primary care dentistry. This is critical as 95% of dental care occurs in this setting. ¹

Key adverse events in dentistry include: ³

- Failure to check medical history (a leading cause of harm),
- Inhalation or swallowing of instruments,
- Restoring or extracting the wrong tooth,
- Lack of access to emergency drugs or oxygen,
- Allergic reactions due to oversight of medical history.

While wrong tooth extraction is a visible error, focusing solely on these limits the understanding of broader, more nuanced patient safety risks that require further investigation. While surgical safety checklists have been shown to reduce harm in hospital-based dental procedures, their effectiveness in primary care dentistry remains unproven. ³

Safety checklists must be developed in collaboration with the clinicians who will be using them. When individuals who are not directly involved in the clinical setting create these checklists, the result is often a suboptimal tool that fails to meet the practical needs of the users. Additionally, audits that focus solely on checking off boxes (i.e., ensuring that forms are completed) without providing constructive feedback, and where results are used in a punitive manner, undermine the effectiveness of these processes. Instead, audits should be designed to encourage learning and improvement, fostering a culture of support rather than punishment. ³

A critical factor in addressing patient safety is recognizing the role of human factors, particularly the concept of the "second victim"—the healthcare provider involved in the error. The emotional and psychological toll on second victims can negatively impact their performance, and therefore patient care, making emotional support essential. ³

Healthcare professionals often work in highly emotionally charged environments, dealing with situations such as aggressive behavior, suicide attempts, sexual boundary violations, and serious or even fatal medical errors. These events can have a significant emotional impact on both individuals and teams. When emotional responses are not adequately addressed, it can lead to detrimental effects on the well-being of healthcare workers and team dynamics. A lack of space for emotional processing may result in increased stress, burnout, and impaired team collaboration, ultimately affecting the quality of patient care. Therefore, it is crucial to create environments that allow healthcare workers to process these emotions in a healthy and constructive manner. ²

There has been a long-standing tendency to use blame and shame when medical errors occur, which discourages healthcare professionals from reporting them due to fear of negative consequences. This culture of fear hinders transparency and learning from mistakes. One way to counteract this is by implementing a 'just culture', which promotes fairness and accountability. In a just culture, organizations establish processes to make balanced, fair decisions regarding actions taken following adverse safety events or near misses. ¹



Near misses, which are safety incidents that do not result in harm but have the potential to do so, are key learning opportunities. A just culture emphasizes openness, transparency, and learning, rather than assigning blame, to encourage the reporting and prevention of future errors. 1

For a just culture to thrive, leadership plays a critical role. Leaders must be visible, accessible, and committed to providing the necessary support and resources. They should set clear behavioral expectations and performance standards to create a culture of shared accountability. When leaders take responsibility for their mistakes, it increases the likelihood that their teams will feel safe to do the same, leading to more accurate reporting of safety concerns.4

Organizations where team members share core values and foster open communication tend to benefit more from safety training than hierarchical structures. Leaders are responsible for creating a system of balanced accountability, where organizations take ownership of system-related failures and individuals are accountable for their personal decisions.4

Van Barlee and colleagues stress the importance of fostering open communication that allows for the expression of differing opinions without judgment or blame. While there is extensive theoretical literature on just culture, its real-world application remains limited.4

In practical terms, a Just Culture algorithm can be used by clinical managers to classify behaviors as human error, at-risk behavior, or reckless behavior. This classification helps tailor the corrective actions to the type of error, enabling systems to address and prevent future incidents. While human error is inevitable, at-risk behaviors can be corrected through coaching and support, though this requires willingness from the individual to change. 4

Healthcare organizations must address both systemic failures and individual errors by implementing effective controls such as barriers, redundancies, and recovery strategies. Ultimately, a just culture supports a values-driven model of shared accountability, balancing corrective action with support, without leaning too heavily on blame or punishment. Like medicine, dentistry must embrace just culture as a foundational step towards building a safety-first culture.4

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MODERN DENTISTRY

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**Dental Billing Specialist
Shelbey Arevalo**

Cover Feature



Shelbey Arevelo

Dental Billing Expert

IN THE INTRICATE WORLD OF DENTISTRY, WHERE PRECISION MEETS CARE AND BUSINESS ACUMEN IS AS CRUCIAL AS CLINICAL SKILL, PROFESSIONALS LIKE SHELBEY AREVELO SHINE BRIGHTLY. WITH OVER 14 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE DENTAL INDUSTRY, AREVELO HAS CARVED A NICHE FOR HERSELF AS A DISTINGUISHED FIGURE IN THE REALM OF DENTAL BILLING AND CONSULTING. HER JOURNEY FROM A YOUNG HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE WITH A PASSION FOR DENTISTRY TO THE FOUNDER OF AREVALO ELITE SERVICES REFLECTS HER UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION.



Embarking on the Journey

Arevalo's journey into the dental field commenced during her senior year of high school when she enrolled in the Regional Occupational Program's Dental Assistant Certification program. Despite the 30-minute commute to Auburn from Roseville High School, her dedication was unwavering. Through rigorous training encompassing CPR certification, X-ray licensing, OSHA, and HIPAA certifications, Arevalo honed her skills, graduating with an outstanding 99% grade.

However, her affinity for dentistry transcended clinical practice, leading her to explore the administrative realm. After brief stints in phlebotomy, Arevalo found her calling as an insurance coordinator at Marconi Dental Group. Here, she cultivated a strong foundation of knowledge, swiftly ascending to the role of lead treatment coordinator. With relentless determination and expertise, she further ascended to manage multiple dental practices, cementing her prowess in dental operations.

Founding Arevalo Elite Services

Motivated by a desire for autonomy and a passion for helping dental practices thrive, Arevalo established Arevalo Elite Services. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which thwarted her initial plans of remote work and travel, Arevalo adapted her business model to meet the burgeoning demand for remote services. Leveraging her extensive experience and industry insight, she laid a robust foundation for her consultancy, poised to revolutionize dental billing and consulting.

Empowering Dental Practices for Success

At the core of Arevelo's mission lies a commitment to empowering dental practices for success. Through meticulous attention to detail and a client-centric approach, she navigates the complexities of dental billing and consulting, propelling practices towards financial prosperity and operational efficiency.

Navigating the Landscape of Dental Billing

Dental billing and consulting play a pivotal role in the success of dental practices. Arevelo's services are meticulously designed to maximize revenue, ensure compliance, enhance patient satisfaction, and foster strategic growth. By addressing critical aspects such as billing, coding, insurance management, collections, and compliance, she equips practices with the tools needed to thrive in a competitive healthcare landscape.

Working Smarter, Not Harder

Arevelo's philosophy of "Working Smarter, Not Harder" permeates every facet of her approach to dental billing and consulting. By prioritizing efficiency, focusing on high-impact activities, fostering continuous improvement, and employing strategic problem-solving, she delivers tangible results for her clients. Through empowerment and strategic guidance, she enables practices to achieve optimal outcomes while minimizing resource expenditure.

Overcoming Common Challenges

In her extensive experience, Arevelo has encountered and overcome myriad inefficiencies and challenges faced by dental practices in their billing processes. From coding errors and incomplete documentation to delayed claim submission and insurance verification issues, she offers comprehensive solutions tailored to each practice's unique needs. By streamlining workflows, implementing technology integration, and providing proactive denial management, she ensures optimal financial performance.

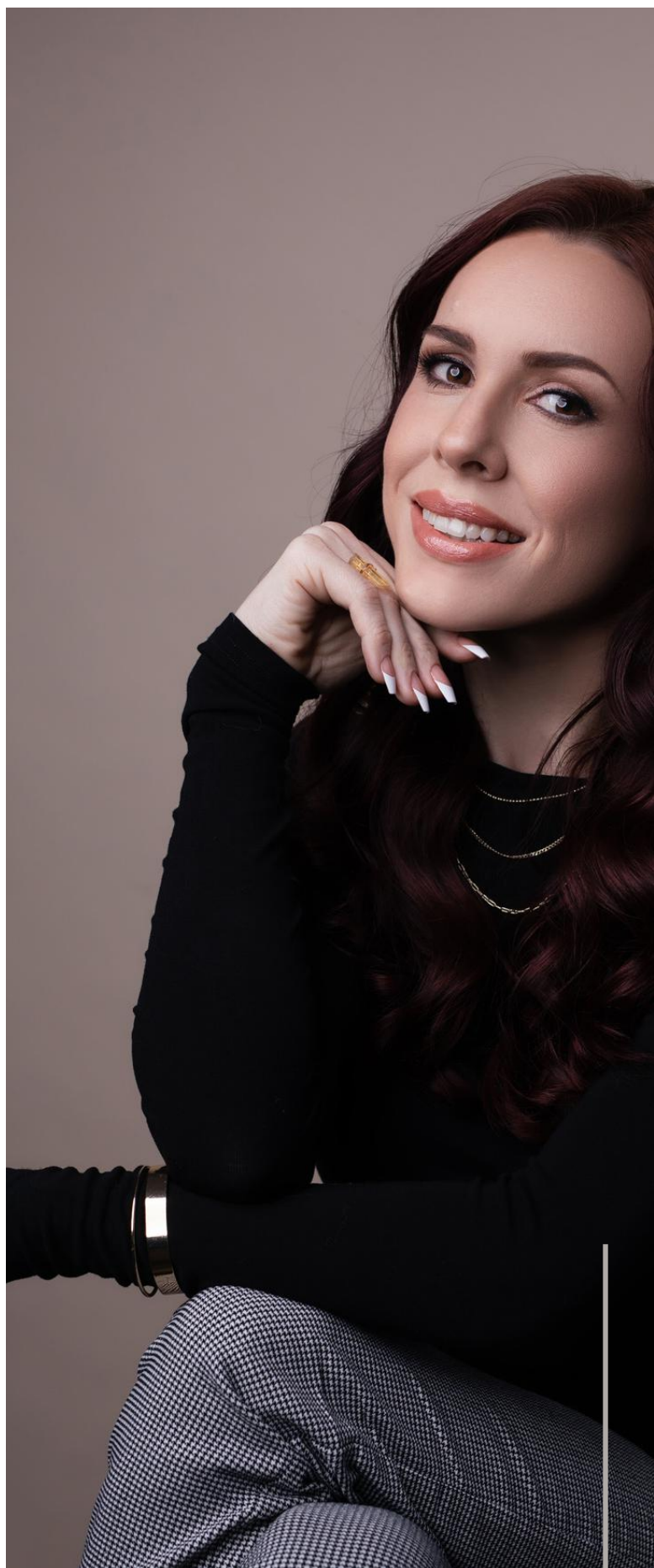
Driving Success Through Collaboration

Arevelo's client-centric approach revolves around fostering strategic collaboration and maintaining long-term partnerships. By understanding client needs, offering customized solutions, providing consistent support, and delivering measurable results, she cultivates enduring relationships built on trust and mutual success.

Pioneering the Future

As Arevelo envisions the future of dental billing and consulting, she anticipates trends such as automated billing systems, telehealth integration, and collaborative care models to shape the industry landscape. With her finger on the pulse of innovation and a steadfast commitment to excellence, she remains poised to lead the charge towards a future where dental practices thrive in an ever-evolving healthcare ecosystem.

In essence, Shelby Arevelo stands as a beacon of expertise and innovation in the realm of dental billing and consulting. Through her unwavering dedication, meticulous attention to detail, and visionary leadership, she continues to redefine the standards of excellence, empowering dental practices to achieve unparalleled success in a dynamic and ever-changing industry landscape.





Is Dental Insurance a Source of Problems, Frustration, or Stress for Your Dental Practice?

Dental insurance often presents challenges that can overwhelm dental practices, from delayed reimbursements to claim denials. The complexities of dental billing can turn what should be a smooth process into a source of stress, slowing down workflows and causing frustration for both staff and patients. However, with the right approach and system in place, these headaches can be significantly reduced. In this article, I'll share insights from my experience in dental billing and consulting at Arevalo Elite Services. I will also provide actionable tips to streamline the billing process from the start of a patient's call to the final billing step.

The Usual Pain Points

Confusing Insurance Policies – Different insurance providers have varying coverage policies and reimbursement rates, making it difficult to predict payments accurately.

Denied or Delayed Claims – Incomplete documentation or coding errors can result in denials, requiring time-consuming appeals.

Patient Communication – Explaining coverage limitations and out-of-pocket expenses can be difficult, leading to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction.

Tip 1: Streamline Insurance Verification at the Start of the Call

The first interaction with the patient, often over the phone or through an online appointment booking system, sets the tone for the billing process. It's essential to verify the patient's insurance information immediately during this initial contact.

How to Implement:

Automate Verification: Utilize automated insurance verification tools that integrate with your practice management software to pull patient insurance information in real-time. This ensures accuracy and saves staff time.

Train Front Desk Staff: Ensure that your front desk team is trained to collect necessary details such as insurance policy numbers, group numbers, and plan types during every call. Create a structured intake form to avoid missing key information.

Tip 2: Accurate Treatment Planning & Preauthorization

Once a patient is in your office, the treatment planning phase is crucial for managing insurance coverage. It's important to ensure that the patient understands what their insurance will cover and what their financial responsibility will be.

How to Implement:

Pre-Estimate Coverage: For more complex treatments, send pre-treatment estimates to the insurance company. This step provides a clear picture of coverage and prevents surprises for both the patient and the practice.

Use Precise Coding: Accurate coding of procedures is key. Invest in training your team to stay up-to-date on changes in CDT codes and ensure proper documentation for each date of service.

Tip 3: Claim Submission – Getting It Right the First Time

One of the most time-consuming aspects of dental billing is the claims process. Submitting incorrect or incomplete claims can result in delays and denials, adding frustration to both your staff and patients.

How to Implement:

Standardize Claim Submission: Ensure all required documentation is included with the claim, such as x-rays, perio charts, and narratives. Missing attachments will slow down the processing time and delay the payment.

Electronic Claims Processing: Switch to electronic claim submission if you haven't already. This reduces the risk of errors and speeds up the approval process.

Tip 4: Post-Treatment Billing – Managing Patient Expectations

Once the insurance company has processed the claim, it's time to bill the patient for any remaining balance. Clear communication here can alleviate misunderstandings that lead to stress for both parties.

How to Implement:

Detailed Statements: Provide patients with detailed statements that break down insurance payments and what is owed by them. Be transparent about any outstanding balances.

Offer Payment Plans: For larger balances, consider offering flexible payment plans or 3rd party financing. This not only improves patient satisfaction but also increases the likelihood of full payment.



Tip 5: Managing the Claims Aging Report – Staying on Top of Unpaid Claims

One of the most crucial but often overlooked tools in managing dental billing effectively is the Claims Aging Report. This report helps you track claims that have not yet been paid by insurance companies. The longer a claim stays unpaid, the harder it becomes to collect, which can directly affect your practice's cash flow.

What is a Claims Aging Report?

A Claims Aging Report categorizes unpaid insurance claims based on how long they've been outstanding. Typically, the report is divided into periods such as:

- 0-30 days
- 31-60 days
- 61-90 days
- 91+ days

As claims age, the likelihood of successful collection diminishes, and follow-up becomes more labor-intensive. Therefore, it's essential to prioritize and act on this report regularly.

Common Issues Leading to Aging Claims

Incomplete or Incorrect Information: Missing attachments, incorrect coding, or incomplete forms can result in claim rejections or delays.

Lack of Follow-up: If the practice fails to follow up with insurance companies promptly, claims can languish in the system.

Insurance Company Delays: Sometimes, the delay is on the insurance provider's end, and consistent follow-up is needed to expedite the process.

Run the Claims Aging Report Weekly- Make it a regular practice to run your Claims Aging Report at least once a week.

- **Filter by Age:** Prioritize claims that are approaching or exceeding the 30-day mark. The sooner you address outstanding claims, the quicker you can resolve issues and receive payment.

Investigate and Follow Up Promptly- When claims show up in the 31-60 days or 61-90 days categories, they need immediate attention. Often, there is a simple reason for the delay that can be resolved with a quick call or resubmission.

- **Assign a Dedicated Team Member:** Designate one team member to be responsible for following up on claims. They should be well-versed in how to communicate with insurance companies, check claim statuses, and resubmit or appeal when necessary.
- **Set Reminders:** Use your practice management software to set reminders for follow-ups. A well-organized follow-up system prevents claims from slipping through the cracks.

Appeal Denied Claims Quickly If a claim is denied, don't delay in initiating the appeals process. Insurance companies often have strict timelines for appeals, and the sooner you address the issue, the better chance you have of securing payment.

- **Review Denial Codes:** Analyze the reason for the denial and correct any issues with coding, attachments, or documentation. Make sure to include a detailed explanation when resubmitting the claim.

Track Your Follow-Up Progress It's essential to not only address aging claims but also monitor how effectively you're doing so. Create a system to track how quickly claims are resolved after follow-up, and look for trends. If claims from a specific insurance company are consistently slow, you may need to adjust your follow-up strategy with that provider.

Keep Patients Informed While the focus of the Claims Aging Report is typically on insurance payments, it's also important to keep your patients in the loop. If an insurance company is slow to pay, update the patient on the status. This transparency helps maintain patient trust and ensures they aren't caught off-guard by unexpected balances due later.

Tip 6: Monitor and Adjust Regularly

Regularly reviewing and adjusting your billing process is crucial to keeping things running smoothly. A well-oiled system should minimize errors and frustrations, but continuous improvement is key.

How to Implement:

Track Key Metrics: Use your practice management software to track metrics such as claim approval rates, average time to payment, and common denial reasons. Regular reports will help identify areas of improvement.

Ongoing Training: Stay ahead of the curve by providing your administrative staff with continuous training. Insurance policies and coding requirements change frequently, and keeping your team informed is critical to avoiding unnecessary stress.

Transform Dental Insurance from Stress to Success

With suitable systems and strategies, dental insurance can shift from a constant headache to a well-oiled part of your practice's operations. By mastering efficient billing processes, accurate claim submissions, and clear communication, you can take control of insurance challenges rather than letting them control you. At Arevalo Elite Services, we're here to help you turn these strategies into reality.

Imagine smoother workflows, faster payments, and a team that feels empowered, not overwhelmed. With expert guidance, your practice can thrive, leaving behind the frustrations of dental insurance and focusing on what truly matters—delivering exceptional patient care.

THE BURNOUT ISSUE

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BURNOUT COACH
Kari Carter-Cherelus RDH,DA





COVER FEATURE

KARI CARTER-CHERELUS

In the world of dentistry, where every smile is a testament to care and expertise, burnout can lurk in the shadows, silently eroding the passion that once ignited a career. But for Kari Carter-Cherelus, burnout wasn't the end of the road—it was the catalyst for a transformative journey toward empowerment, advocacy, and resilience.



A Childhood Passion Ignited: From a tender age, Kari's fascination with teeth was palpable. Whether meticulously brushing her teeth or eagerly attending dental appointments, her affinity for dentistry was unmistakable. However, the path to her current role as a dental hygienist and burnout coach was not a straight line. After shelving aspirations of becoming an environmental engineer, Kari's mother steered her towards dental hygiene—a decision that set the stage for her multifaceted career. After graduating from Palm Beach State College in 2005, Kari embarked on a professional journey that would eventually lead her to confront and conquer the scourge of burnout within the dental industry.

Navigating the Storm: The Birth of a Burnout Coach: Kari's journey through the corridors of dentistry was not without its trials. Faced with the harrowing specter of burnout, she found herself grappling with exhaustion, insomnia, and a pervasive sense of disillusionment. Like many in her field, she initially struggled to recognize the symptoms for what they were—signs of burnout silently gnawing away at her well-being. However, through introspection, courage, and a steadfast refusal to surrender to despair, Kari emerged from the crucible of burnout with a newfound purpose: to guide others through the labyrinthine maze of burnout and towards the beacon of empowerment.

The Beacon of Hope: A Guide Through the Darkness: Drawing from her own experiences, Kari authored "The Ultimate Guide For Dental Hygienist Burnout," a beacon of hope amidst the darkness of professional disillusionment. Rooted in empathy and seasoned with practical wisdom, her book serves as a roadmap for both novices and seasoned veterans navigating the treacherous waters of burnout. From forging alliances with supportive workplaces to cultivating self-care rituals and setting boundaries, Kari's guide offers a lifeline to those adrift in the turbulent sea of burnout.

Empowerment Through Empathy: As a burnout coach, Kari's mission transcends mere guidance—it embodies a profound commitment to empowerment through empathy. By helping clients harness their latent potential and confront the demons of self-doubt and imposter syndrome, she illuminates the path toward self-actualization and professional fulfillment. Through her coaching sessions, Kari instills in her clients the belief that the power to effect change lies within them, waiting to be unleashed through courage and perseverance.

Cultivating a Culture of Care: At the heart of Kari's mission lies a fervent belief in the transformative power of a supportive workplace culture. By advocating for respectful discourse, fostering open communication, and championing the value of every team member's voice, she endeavors to create environments where burnout is not merely addressed but prevented. In her vision, every workplace becomes a sanctuary of appreciation, where the contributions of each individual are celebrated and nurtured.

Looking Towards the Horizon: As Kari's influence continues to ripple across industries and professions, her gaze remains fixed on the horizon of possibility. With aspirations to speak at more conferences, conduct workshops, and amplify her impact on a global scale, she remains steadfast in her commitment to healing and empowerment. For Kari, each testimonial of positive change is not just a validation of her efforts—it's a testament to the enduring power of resilience and the human capacity for transformation.



COVER FEATURE

A Call to Action: To those grappling with burnout's suffocating embrace, Kari extends a lifeline of hope and guidance. Through her book, coaching services, and advocacy, she stands as a beacon of resilience in a world often shrouded in darkness. And to organizations and leaders seeking to foster cultures of care and empowerment, she offers a simple yet profound message: change begins from within, and together, we can sculpt a future where burnout is a distant memory.

Embracing the Journey: As Kari Carter-Cherelus continues to traverse the winding paths of dentistry and burnout advocacy, her story serves as a reminder that even in the darkest of times, hope remains a steadfast companion. With courage as her compass and empathy as her guiding star, she leads the way towards a future where burnout is not an inevitability, but a challenge to be met with resilience, compassion, and unwavering determination.





Rose Colored Glasses

Recently, I went to the optometrist for my yearly checkup. Without contacts or glasses, I am nearsighted meaning that I can see objects that are close to me clearly however objects in the distance are blurry. The optometrist informed me that the prescription in my right eye had once again changed. I hadn't really noticed a decline, however the new contact lenses he gave me are so much clearer. Life coach Iyanla Vanzant says, "Your eyes will adjust to the level of deficiency in their focus...Our eyes have adjusted to a certain level of deficiencies, and we then adjust our lives to the deficiencies that we see." Just as I was unaware of the decline of my vision, as dental professionals we can become unaware of the decline of our own overall health and wellness as it concerns our mental health. Often, we are so consumed with focusing on others such as our patients or our family members that we ignore our own bodies warning signals to us.

We might get accustomed to the dysfunction and find a way to either ignore or endure it until we finally recognize that we can no longer see clearly through the haze. This usually occurs when we have hit rock bottom. I regularly speak with dental professionals who feel as though they have lost their way. They may suffer from feelings of burnout and overwhelm or feeling unempowered in their career and in their lives. This unfortunately is a common feeling amongst healthcare professionals because of the high stress levels, physical demands, lack of work-life balance, a tendency to be perfectionists, and the constant emotional toll of dealing with patients. I can empathize with them due to having felt the same way throughout my career on several occasions.

Many healthcare professionals I speak with often continue to work in environments that aren't conducive to their career growth or their mental health. Often, they stay in these environments due to their fear of change, lack of options in their area, or not wanting to leave their patients behind. They subliminally often adjust to the discomfort. Have you ever had a patient that wouldn't turn towards you despite your constant requests? So, in return you just give in and contort your body to fit the angle they are laying in; to render the care you are providing them. You are adjusting your body to the discomfort. You might not realize how often you do this throughout the day. By acquiescing you are in retrospect contributing overtime to your own burnout due to ergonomic issues and body pain...you are giving up your control.

A good ergonomic coach can assess your habits and strategize ways to help you to make necessary changes to increase the longevity of your career and help with discomfort. They may also recommend ergonomic loupes, a saddle stool, and custom fit a specialized regiment of exercises for you to strengthen your muscles. Likewise, a burnout coach will help you self-evaluate and assess what changes that you can commit to so that you will be able to manage any burnout symptoms and work on empowering yourself.

My own healing journey started with me taking continuing education courses during the pandemic. I had always taken courses as a necessity to keep my dental hygiene license. During the pandemic I began taking a plethora of courses out of the boredom, the joy of learning, and feeling the sense of community amongst my peers. Taking courses that interested me led me to becoming a public speaker after accepting mentorship from *Jasmin Haley* who was able to help guide and keep me accountable to act upon my goals. Attending in-person conferences has allowed me to network with colleagues who I had become friends with online. Getting to know these amazing colleagues who inspire me because of all the incredible things they are doing in the dental industry has helped to transform my mindset. Often when one is dealing with burnout, they feel isolated and hopeless. Surrounding ourselves with individuals who can relate to our feelings because of their own past experiences can prove helpful to seeing our way through our own figurative nearsightedness. They can help us to see that our future is indeed bright.

As our industry progresses it is imperative that we embrace technology that can help alleviate some of the stress of patient care. The wave of the future is AI, digital dentistry, 3D printing, intraoral scanners, CBCT, laser dentistry, telehealth, and practice management software that enables patient care to become more efficient. This can seem scary to some and hard to master to ones who are tech-challenged at times like me. Most of my close friends know that I love Star Trek. In Star Trek, The Borg are an alien group that forcibly assimilates individuals into joining them, they are known to say, "Resistance is futile." Likewise, ones who refuse to adapt to our changing industry regarding accepting new technology and updated protocols are only in the end doing themselves and their patients a disservice. I have learned that taking the time to educate myself on new technology and systems has ultimately helped me to deliver more efficient patient care that also helps with my time management.

What I have struggled with is making sure that I consistently find time to prioritize my own self-care. Self-care isn't always a spa treatment or luxurious trip somewhere. Often it is making sure that we regularly exercise, consume a balanced diet, make sure we are getting the rest we need, and practicing mindfulness daily. Daily, I wear many different hats so finding time to do this can prove difficult. Scheduling in time for myself just as I allow others to place themselves on my calendar has allowed me to be more consistent in making sure I take care of my own needs daily. With self-evaluation and positive action towards making impactful changes, we can empower ourselves and improve our effectiveness in delivering patient care that we can be proud of.





DENTIST

MAY'24

AMANDA HOFFMEISTER, DDS

THE GREEN DENTIST

THE GREEN DENTISTRY ISSUE

COVER FEATURE

THE GREEN DENTIST

In the realm of dentistry, where the focus traditionally lies on oral health and patient care, there emerges a trailblazer, a visionary who not only tends to the smiles of her young patients but also nurtures a profound commitment to the health of our planet. Meet Amanda Hoffmeister, DDS, affectionately known as "The Green Dentist," whose dedication to sustainability has transformed her pediatric dental practice into a beacon of eco-consciousness and environmental stewardship.



1. A Journey into Green Dentistry:

For Dr. Amanda Hoffmeister, the journey into green dentistry began with a realization during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world grappled with the widespread use of single-use plastics and the surge in medical waste, Dr. Hoffmeister recognized the urgent need for change. It was a pivotal moment that ignited her quest for a more sustainable approach to dentistry. Through research and reflection, she uncovered the staggering environmental impact of conventional dental practices, prompting her to seek alternatives that aligned with her values of environmental responsibility.

2. Prioritizing Sustainability:

While many dentists focus solely on traditional dental practices, Dr. Hoffmeister was driven by a deeper purpose – a commitment to leave a positive impact on both her patients and the planet. She understood that as healthcare professionals, dentists have a moral obligation to do what's right for their patients and the environment. By prioritizing sustainability, she aimed to reduce the carbon footprint of her practice and promote a holistic approach to oral health that encompasses the well-being of both individuals and the planet.

3. Shaping Passion for Green Dentistry:

Dr. Hoffmeister's passion for green dentistry was shaped by her experiences during the pandemic and her deep understanding of the interconnectedness between human health and environmental sustainability. Witnessing the staggering amount of medical waste generated by dental practices, she realized the urgent need for change. Armed with knowledge and determination, she embarked on a journey to revolutionize her practice, guided by the belief that dentistry can be a force for good in the world.

4. Communicating Environmental Stewardship to Young Patients:

As a pediatric dentist, Dr. Hoffmeister recognizes the importance of educating her young patients about environmental stewardship. From the waiting room to the treatment room, she creates opportunities for children to learn about the importance of sustainability through storytelling, interactive activities, and leading by example. By integrating environmental themes into her practice, she empowers her patients to become agents of change and stewards of the planet from an early age.

5. Key Environmental Practices Implemented:

Dr. Hoffmeister's clinic is a testament to her commitment to environmental responsibility. From energy-efficient practices to digital technology and sustainable procurement policies, every aspect of her practice is designed to minimize environmental impact while maintaining the highest standards of patient care and safety. By embracing eco-friendly practices and technologies, she demonstrates that sustainability and quality healthcare can go hand in hand.



6. Addressing Environmental Challenges:

Dr. Hoffmeister recognizes the significant environmental challenges facing the dental industry today, from water and energy consumption to waste generation and chemical usage. Through green dentistry practices, she offers solutions to these challenges, advocating for sustainable alternatives and innovations that prioritize both patient care and environmental sustainability.

7. Hopes for the Future of Sustainability:

As a pioneer in the field of green dentistry, Dr. Hoffmeister envisions a future where sustainable practices are the norm in dental clinics worldwide. She hopes to see increased collaboration, innovation, and awareness within the dental industry, leading to a healthier and more sustainable future for all. By integrating sustainability into every aspect of dental care, she believes dentistry can become a catalyst for positive environmental change.

8. Role of Education and Awareness:

Education and awareness play a crucial role in promoting green dentistry among both dental professionals and the general public. Dr. Hoffmeister emphasizes the importance of raising awareness about the environmental impact of dental practices and empowering individuals to make informed choices that prioritize sustainability. Through education and advocacy efforts, she aims to inspire a collective commitment to environmental responsibility within the dental community and beyond.

9. Steps Towards Sustainability:

For dental practices interested in adopting more sustainable and eco-friendly practices, Dr. Hoffmeister offers practical advice and encouragement. She suggests forming a green team, conducting a sustainability assessment, and setting SMART sustainability goals. By taking incremental steps and embracing the journey toward sustainability, dental practices can make a meaningful difference in reducing their environmental footprint.

10. Responding to Growing Demand:

As awareness of environmental issues grows, Dr. Hoffmeister acknowledges the growing demand among patients for eco-friendly dental practices. By responding to this demand in her clinic, she not only attracts new patients but also contributes to positive environmental change. Through her example, she hopes to inspire other dental professionals to embrace sustainability and prioritize the health of both their patients and the planet.

11. Personal Message:

In closing, Dr. Hoffmeister shares a personal message of encouragement to fellow dental professionals considering integrating sustainability into their practices. She urges them to take the first step in faith, knowing that even small efforts can make a significant impact when multiplied across communities and societies. By embracing sustainability as a journey, not a destination, she believes we can all contribute to a healthier planet with healthy smiles.

Dr. Hoffmeister stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, leading the way toward a future where oral health and environmental sustainability go hand in hand. As "The Green Dentist," she embodies the spirit of innovation, compassion, and stewardship, reminding us that by caring for our planet, we ultimately care for ourselves and future generations.



Each year, over 400 million tons of plastic are produced globally, and from that, a staggering 12-23 million tons end up in our oceans. Unfortunately, less than 10% of this plastic is recycled. The U.S. health sector alone contributes 8.5% of national carbon emissions. As confirmed by the IPCC report, there is irrefutable evidence that human activities are driving global warming, impacting 85% of the world's population. The time is now for rapid, large-scale changes in every aspect of life, including dentistry, to limit global warming to 1.5°C or less.

Green dentistry is an eco-friendly approach to reducing the environmental impact of dental practices. By adopting sustainable practices, dental professionals can play a vital role in combating climate change while maintaining high-quality patient care.

Assess Your Current Practices

The first step toward sustainability can feel intimidating, but it's crucial for making meaningful change. Establishing a green team within your practice can help streamline this process. This team, composed of dedicated individuals, will lead the charge in assessing your current environmental footprint and setting sustainability goals.

To start, use a carbon footprint calculator to determine your baseline. This will give you a clear picture of where your practice stands in terms of resource use and emissions. Additionally, conducting monthly waste audits can help you identify areas for improvement. By tracking water and power bills, you can also pinpoint resource consumption and set goals for reduction.

Choose Eco-Friendly Options

A 2018 study found that 20% of medical waste consists of single-use plastics. In dental practices, much of this waste comes from sterilization supplies like Cavicide wipes, tray covers, X-ray covers, masks, and gloves, as well as materials used in procedures such as fillings and crowns. Improper disposal of these items can lead to environmental pollution and the growing problem of microplastics.

As both dentists and patients become more conscious of sustainability, we are seeing more innovation in eco-friendly dental products. Below are some simple swaps that can significantly reduce your practice's waste:

Traditional Item	Sustainable Swap
Plastic autoclave bags	Enviro pouch
Plastic impression trays	Digital scanner
Plastic HVE tips	Paper HVE tips
Single use soap dispensers	Refillable glass or stainless steel soap dispensers
Single use plastic cups	Stainless steel or compostable cups
Single use bibs and chair covers	Cloth bibs and chair covers

Image 1: Table showing sustainable swaps that will reduce waste in the dental office.

Implement Digital Solutions

Digital dentistry is no longer the future—it's the present. Dentists now have access to technologies like digital CAD/CAM, digital X-rays, and digital scanners, which are transforming the way dental care is delivered.

Digital CAD/CAM enables same-day restorations without the need for physical impressions or models, reducing both waste and transportation emissions to the lab and back. Additionally, digital X-rays offer numerous advantages: they produce clearer images, expose patients to less radiation, and reduce chemical waste from traditional film development.



The early stages of AI in dentistry are also beginning to improve workflow efficiency, allowing us to optimize diagnostic accuracy with digital X-rays. Digital technologies not only enhance patient care but also drastically cut down on the environmental impact compared to traditional methods.

Go Paperless

Going paperless is another easy way to reduce your practice's environmental footprint. Instead of relying on traditional mail, dental offices can communicate electronically with patients, healthcare providers, and insurance companies. This not only saves time and money, but also reduces paper waste.

QR codes allow for instant sharing of information with patients, eliminating the need for printed pamphlets. This eco-friendly shift also saves money, as the cost of printing and paper can add up over time.

Reduce Water Usage

Dental practices are notorious for their high water consumption, using an estimated 360 gallons per day, largely due to the use of wet vacuum systems. While wet vacuums may be cheaper initially, they drive up water and energy costs, and they often require replacement every 5-12 years.

Switching to a dry vacuum system can be a game-changer. Dry vacuums use no water and can save a typical dental office around 200,000 gallons annually. With regular maintenance, a dry vacuum pump can last up to 25 years, making it a more sustainable and cost-effective choice in the long run.

Optimize Energy Efficiency

Energy conservation is another key aspect of sustainable dentistry. Incorporating energy-efficient appliances, such as Energy Star devices and LED lighting, can significantly reduce energy consumption. For instance, LED lighting alone can cut energy use by up to 90%. Using smart thermostats, surge protectors, and the eco-mode setting on laundry machines can further lower energy usage.

Incorporating occupancy sensors in rooms that are not in constant use also helps reduce electricity waste. It's estimated that lighting accounts for about 6% of a dental office's energy consumption, and occupancy sensors help minimize this.

Don't forget about phantom energy—the electricity used by devices that are plugged in but not in use. Unplugging devices or using surge protectors can help mitigate this hidden energy cost, which accounts for about 10% of energy bills. Additionally, check with your energy provider about sourcing electricity from renewable sources like solar or wind power.

Educate Staff and Patients

Sustainability doesn't stop in the office—it extends to patients' personal oral hygiene routines as well. In the U.S., approximately 1 billion toothbrushes are discarded each year, contributing an estimated 50 million pounds of plastic waste to landfills and across the pond in the UK, it is estimated that 300 million tubes of toothpaste end up in their landfills each year. The US uses 3 million miles of floss every year.

Educating patients about sustainable oral care options—like bamboo toothbrushes, compostable floss, and toothpaste tablets in refillable packaging—can significantly reduce waste. Encouraging patients to adopt preventive care routines like regular cleanings and sealants not only improves their health, but also lowers the environmental impact of more invasive procedures.

For example, the production of a composite filling generates 15 kg of emissions, whereas dentures produce 58-71 kg. By focusing on early intervention and preventive care, dental offices can reduce the need for resource-heavy treatments, lowering overall emissions and waste.

Sustainable dentistry is not only an ethical responsibility but also a crucial step toward preserving our environment while maintaining oral health. By evaluating current practices, incorporating eco-friendly alternatives, embracing digital solutions, and reducing water and energy consumption, dental offices can play a pivotal role in minimizing their environmental impact. Educating both staff and patients on sustainable habits further extends this impact, promoting a healthier planet while improving patient care. Sustainable dentistry is not just about reducing waste today; it is about ensuring a cleaner, healthier future for tomorrow.

DENTISTE

JUN '24

THE FUTURE OF
DENTISTRY:
DIGITAL
INFLUENCE &
PERSONAL
BRANDING

+
INTRODUCING
AUREZZI -THE
ORAL GOLD
STANDARD

MELANIE
SILVESTRINI, DMD

Cover Feature

Melanie Silvestrini

few professionals have managed to seamlessly integrate the science of dental health with the art of facial aesthetics. Dr. Melanie Rosalia Silvestrini, renowned for her innovative approach and holistic philosophy, has set a new standard in dental care, emphasizing the importance of balance between appearance and function. Her practice is not merely about creating beautiful smiles but fostering overall well-being.



Digital Influence, Dental Innovation and Empowering Personal Branding in Dentistry

Dr. Silvestrini's dedication to conservative cosmetic dentistry is a testament to her commitment to minimally invasive procedures. This approach, which includes composite bonding, porcelain veneers, and teeth whitening, prioritizes the preservation of natural tooth structure. The benefits for patients are manifold: reduced risk of complications, quicker recovery times, and results that look as natural as they are enduring.

Her passion extends beyond the confines of her practice. Through community outreach and pro-bono initiatives, Dr. Silvestrini has made significant strides in providing essential dental care to underserved populations. These efforts not only improve oral health but also uplift the overall quality of life, addressing disparities in healthcare access and promoting well-being.

"Dental Talk 360," Dr. Silvestrini's podcast, is another platform where she shares her wealth of knowledge. Designed to demystify dental topics and promote oral health awareness, the podcast reflects her commitment to education and empowering listeners to make informed decisions about their dental care.

Dr. Silvestrini's practice is at the forefront of technological advancements in dentistry. The integration of digital imaging, 3D printing, and CAD/CAM technology allows for unparalleled precision and efficiency. High-quality materials and the latest techniques ensure that her patients receive the most advanced care available.

Evidence-based dentistry forms the bedrock of her practice, combining the latest research with clinical expertise and patient preferences to achieve the best outcomes. This approach ensures her practice remains innovative, providing the highest level of care.

Her advanced training in facial aesthetics and TMJ disorders enables her to address a wide range of patient needs. By incorporating these aspects into her cosmetic and restorative work, she ensures treatments that enhance both function and appearance, leading to higher patient satisfaction.

The holistic principles that Dr. Silvestrini advocates are evident in every aspect of her practice. She uses biocompatible materials, promotes preventive care, and considers lifestyle factors in treatment planning. This comprehensive approach supports the body's natural healing processes and contributes to long-term health, benefiting patients with improved outcomes and enhanced overall wellness.

Digital smile design and facial analysis are critical components of her treatment planning process, especially for procedures like porcelain veneers and composite bonding. By using advanced imaging technology, she can create detailed, personalized plans that ensure harmonious, natural-looking results.



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DR. MELANIE SILVESTRINI
S



Dr. Melanie Silvestrini
General & Cosmetic Dentistry



Cover Feature

"I integrate dentistry and facial aesthetics by taking a holistic approach to patient care. Understanding the interplay between dental health and facial aesthetics allows me to offer treatments that enhance overall appearance while ensuring optimal dental function."

Membership in prestigious organizations like the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and the New York State Dental Association allows Dr. Silvestrini to stay updated on the latest advancements and best practices, ensuring her patients receive care that incorporates the most current and effective techniques and technologies.

Navigating the delicate balance between enhancing self-image and avoiding unhealthy beauty standards, Dr. Silvestrini adopts a patient-centered approach. She emphasizes open communication and ethical considerations, setting realistic expectations and focusing on enhancing natural beauty.

While patient desires are crucial, Dr. Silvestrini prioritizes overall well-being. She advocates for alternative treatments if a requested cosmetic procedure might compromise dental health, educating patients about the potential risks and benefits to help them understand the importance of prioritizing their health.

As a mentor and guide for other dentists focusing on personal branding, Dr. Silvestrini shares her experiences and innovative ideas. She helps them identify their unique strengths and passions, leveraging these in their branding to create a compelling online presence and connect with their audience through personal storytelling. Looking to the future, Dr. Silvestrini envisions a seamless integration of advanced technology and holistic practices in dental care. Digital tools like 3D imaging,

AI-driven diagnostics, and virtual consultations will revolutionize diagnosis and treatment, while holistic practices like nutritional counseling and biocompatible materials will become more prevalent.

Balancing aesthetic enhancements with maintaining dental health is a core tenet of her practice. By prioritizing minimally invasive techniques and patient education, Dr. Silvestrini ensures that aesthetic goals are achieved without compromising dental health.

Reflecting on her journey, Dr. Silvestrini hopes to leave a legacy of innovation, compassion, and empowerment in the dental field. She aims to inspire other dentists to integrate their passions into their professional lives, creating a more fulfilling and impactful career. Her commitment to holistic patient care and continuous learning sets a standard for excellence, fostering a ripple effect that will influence future generations of dental professionals.

Dr. Melanie Rosalia Silvestrini is not just a dentist; she is a visionary, a mentor, and a pioneer in the field of holistic dental care. Her dedication to integrating aesthetics with health, coupled with her passion for community service and education, makes her a standout figure in the world of cosmetic dentistry. Through her innovative approach, she is redefining what it means to provide comprehensive, patient-centered dental care.

DENTITE

JUL'24



ASHLEY FAGAN, DDS

A LUXURIOUS TWIST
ON DENTISTRY

Cover Feature



Dr. Fagan's story is one of passion, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to transforming the dental experience. From a young age, her love for math, science, and helping others laid the foundation for a career that seamlessly blends expertise with empathy. Raised in a family dedicated to education and service, Dr. Fagan was inspired by her father's military and dental background. This upbringing instilled in her a discipline and drive to make a meaningful impact, which she found in the field of dentistry.

Cover Feature

Early Inspirations and Diverse Experiences

A Foundation in Service and Education

"My journey into dentistry began at a young age. I always had interest in maths and sciences as well as an innate desire to help others. Growing up in a family with a strong emphasis on education and service, particularly with my father's military and dental background, instilled in me a sense of discipline and a drive to make a difference. Dentistry appealed to me because of the work-life balance vs working in the hospital. It also allows me to improve people's health and smiles, which can significantly impact their confidence and overall quality of life."

Embracing Cultural Diversity

Growing up in various places due to her father's military career, Dr. Fagan was exposed to diverse cultures and communities. These experiences taught her the importance of adaptability and understanding different perspectives, which are crucial in patient care. She developed a deep appreciation for personalized care and the need to cater to each patient's unique background and needs. These experiences shaped her approach to dentistry, emphasizing empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to providing the best possible care for all patients.

The Birth of La Luxe Dental

Innovating the Dental Experience

The inspiration behind La Luxe Dental came from Dr. Fagan's desire to positively change the dental experience. She envisioned a space where patients could feel relaxed and pampered while receiving top-notch dental care. By combining luxury and spa-like treatments, she aimed to reduce the anxiety and stress often associated with dental visits. Her vision was to offer comprehensive dentistry, where comfort and patient well-being are paramount, making dental care a positive and enjoyable experience.

Autonomy and Patient-Centered Care

Autonomy in patient care is essential to Dr. Fagan because it allows her to tailor treatments specifically to each patient's needs without external constraints. This autonomy ensures that she can uphold the highest standards of care and create an atmosphere that reflects her values and philosophy. By having control over the environment and patient interactions, she can foster a welcoming, supportive, and stress-free experience, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes and satisfaction.



Unique Elements of La Luxe Dental

A Blend of High-Quality Care and Spa-Like Amenities

La Luxe Dental stands out due to its unique blend of high-quality dental care and spa-like amenities. The office offers a comfort menu featuring essential oils, calming music, and weighted blankets to enhance the patient experience. State-of-the-art technology ensures precision and efficiency in treatments. Additionally, the personalized care and attention each patient receives, combined with the serene office environment, create an unparalleled dental experience.

Overcoming Challenges

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

Navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic required resilience, adaptability, and meticulous planning. Despite the uncertainties, Dr. Fagan remained committed to her vision and used the time to design the office, refine services, enhance safety protocols, and prepare her team to deliver exceptional care. She focused on ensuring the safety of future patients and team members by implementing infection control measures and staying updated with the latest health guidelines.

Staying Motivated

"My unwavering belief in God kept me motivated. The positive feedback and support from my family and friends reinforced my decision. Lastly, I have always believed that when I put my mind to something, I work hard to achieve it. This determination and perseverance fueled my drive to make La Luxe Dental a reality, despite the uncertainties."

Enhancing Patient Experience

Creating a Welcoming Atmosphere

To ensure a positive and calming experience, La Luxe Dental focuses on creating a welcoming and serene atmosphere from the moment patients walk in. The team is trained to provide compassionate and attentive care, addressing any concerns and making patients feel comfortable. Personalized touches like a weighted blanket and neck pillow help patients relax and enjoy their visit.

The Role of Essential Oils and Calming Music

Essential oils and calming music help create a soothing environment that eases anxiety and promotes relaxation. The comfort menu, which includes options like weighted blankets, neck pillows, and noise-canceling headphones, allows patients to customize their experience to their preferences. These elements work together to transform a routine dental visit into a peaceful and rejuvenating experience, enhancing overall patient satisfaction.

Representation and Advocacy

Breaking Barriers and Challenging Stereotypes

Being a Black female dentist is a source of pride and responsibility for Dr. Fagan. Personally, it means breaking barriers and challenging stereotypes, showing that diversity in the dental field is not only possible but essential. Professionally, it drives her to provide excellent care and serve as a role model for aspiring dentists from under-represented backgrounds. It's an opportunity to inspire and empower others, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse profession.







Community Engagement

Supporting Girls On the Run DC

La Luxe Dental sponsors a girl for Girls On the Run DC for every new patient. Supporting this program aligns with Dr. Fagan's commitment to empowerment and community engagement. The program promotes physical fitness, self-confidence, and leadership skills in young girls and ends with a 5K run. Running has been a release for Dr. Fagan and helped her sort through many feelings and decisions with opening the office during the pandemic. She wishes she had a program like Girls On the Run – DC available to her when she was their age.

Impact on the Community

Our involvement with Girls On the Run DC aims to positively impact the community by providing young girls with the tools and confidence they need to succeed. By supporting this program, we're investing in the future and helping to create a generation of strong, confident, and capable women.

Personal Insights

The Influence of Running

Running has significantly influenced Dr. Fagan's approach to dentistry by teaching her discipline, perseverance, and the importance of setting and achieving goals. The mental and physical stamina required for marathon training translates into her professional life, where she applies the same principles to overcome challenges and strive for excellence. Running also provides a healthy outlet for stress relief, helping her maintain a balanced and focused mindset.

Maintaining Work-Life Balance

In addition to running, Dr. Fagan enjoys reading, spending time with friends and family, and traveling. Reading allows her to continuously learn and grow, both personally and professionally.

Traveling provides new experiences and perspectives, helping her recharge and relax. Spending time with family and friends is essential for Dr. Fagan, as their support and companionship are invaluable, and these moments together bring joy and balance to her life.

Future Goals and Advice

Long-Term Vision for La Luxe Dental

Dr. Fagan's long-term goals for La Luxe Dental include expanding services and reach while maintaining a commitment to personalized, high-quality care. This includes incorporating the latest advancements in dental technology, expanding the team of skilled professionals, and continuing to enhance the patient experience.

Inspiring the Next Generation

"My advice to young women, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, is to believe in yourself and your potential. Don't let societal barriers or stereotypes deter you from pursuing your dreams. Seek out mentors and role models who can provide guidance and support along your journey. Work hard, stay focused, and be resilient in the face of challenges. Remember that your unique perspective and experiences are valuable assets in the field of dentistry; representation matters."

Final Thoughts

Dr. Fagan is not only transforming the dental experience but also paving the way for future generations of dentists. Her dedication to excellence, patient care, and community engagement sets a new standard in the dental industry. And for those looking for a fulfilling career with a commitment to quality care.

And oh, La Luxe Dental is hiring.

DENTAL

AUG'24



KATRINA SANDERS, RDH

THE DENTAL WINEGENIST



FEATURE ARTICLE

KATRINA SANDERS

"There was a stronger opportunity in dentistry—an opportunity for a voice, perhaps a provocative one, to begin normalizing excellence."

FEATURE ARTICLE

Katrina Sanders is no stranger to the stage, the classroom, or the dental chair. As a passionate educator and advocate for excellence in dental care, she has spent her career transforming the way the industry views education, empowerment, and the pursuit of excellence. This October, Dente Magazine is proud to feature Katrina Sanders as our cover star—a dynamic voice who continues to challenge the status quo in dental education and patient care.

"My name is Katrina Sanders, and it is an honor to be your cover girl for October," she begins with a smile. "So, I'm going to start by saying a hello and cheers!" Sanders' light-hearted, engaging style instantly sets the tone for our conversation, one that blends humor with profound insights into the profession she has dedicated her life to.

We dive into the core of her mission—elevating the dental profession through education, encouragement, and empowerment. When asked about the pivotal moment that led her down this path, Sanders reflects deeply. "I don't know if there was a precise moment," she shares thoughtfully, "but I do remember, as a practicing dental hygienist, fresh out of hygiene school, just in love with the profession. And then, entering a clinical practice where things were done...differently. I was told, 'that's just the way we do things here,' as if that was an excuse for delivering less than the standard of excellence we should always aim for."

That realization was a turning point for her. "For me, that was an eye-opening moment. It told me there was a stronger opportunity in dentistry—an opportunity for a voice, perhaps a provocative one, but a voice to begin normalizing excellence."

Inspiring others to join her pursuit of clinical excellence became central to her work. Today, Katrina Sanders leads a growing community of dental professionals who believe in constantly pushing the boundaries of their knowledge and practice. "I hope that by sharing my story and experiences, I can remind others that we are never finished learning, growing, or striving for the best," she says.

Through her role as an international speaker, Sanders has been able to touch the lives of countless dental professionals. "I fell in love with dental hygiene from day one of hygiene school," she recalls with nostalgia. "And I fell in love with it all over again when I began teaching. Being able to influence the next generation of dental hygienists—it showed me the power of legacy, the importance of passing on what was once taught to me."

Her teaching style, much like her speaking, is both engaging and deeply meaningful. With every lecture, she aims to empower her audience by reminding them of their intrinsic value in the healthcare system. "We, as providers, need to feel empowered to do what we do best. I tell my audiences—every time—that they have all the tools they need inside them. They got into this profession for a reason: because they care, because they want to make a difference."



"I fell in love with dental hygiene from day one of hygiene school, and I fell in love with it all over again when I began teaching."

"Every time I stand in front of an audience, I hope to remind them of the power they already have."



KATRINA SANDERS



FEATURE

PART 2



Inspiration Behind Sanders Board Prep

When asked what inspired her to create Sanders Board Prep, Katrina reflects on her time as a faculty member and the impact her students had on her. She explains, "I left my faculty position, and the students who were still at the school were so nervous about preparing for their boards." Several of those students reached out to her, asking for guidance. "They asked, 'Katrina, can we come hang out in your dining room and drink wine and eat Cheetos while we study?'" she recalls with a laugh.

This informal study group turned into a profound learning experience. "Every single student who studied with me passed their national boards on their first try." This small dining room gathering eventually evolved into a national and international resource. "We no longer host dental hygiene students in my dining room," Katrina shares. "Sanders Board Prep is now available online through a virtual study lounge where students from around the world can access our content."

The growth of Sanders Board Prep goes beyond just being a study tool. Sanders emphasizes, "My proudest achievement is how Sanders Board Prep is helping to emulsify programs globally." The program has donated lectures to dental therapists and providers in underserved countries across Asia, Africa, and South America, ensuring they receive high-level education akin to what students in the United States have access to.

Addressing Modern Educational Challenges

In recent years, dental hygiene students have faced unprecedented challenges. Sanders points out that the shift started in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Prior to that, students were quite accommodating to whatever teaching style their faculty used," she notes. However, the pandemic forced educators to transition quickly to virtual learning models. "For didactic content, digitizing is possible. But clinical practices, like how to hold an instrument or perform injection techniques, presented a unique challenge."

One solution to these challenges is the adoption of a "flipped classroom" model, which Sanders Board Prep has embraced. This model allows students to review didactic content from home, and then come to class ready for interactive discussions. "Instead of a professor delivering a one-way lecture, the classroom becomes an interactive conversation," Sanders explains. "Students now come in with questions, and I act as a facilitator."

Looking forward, Sanders sees continued integration of new learning technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) for visualizing anatomy and more bite-sized, easily digestible content. "It's an exciting future for dental hygiene," she says, "and for what these highly educated individuals will do for the profession."

Innovative Role as Clinical Liaison at AZPerio

As a clinical liaison for AZPerio, Sanders works closely with board-certified periodontists. Her role is a unique blend of clinical and educational responsibilities. "I have the best job in the world," she says proudly. "I get to educate patients, assist in surgeries, and work alongside incredible doctors, dental hygienists, and other staff."



Sanders also plays a significant role in coaching and mentoring dental hygienists. “We work with top referral practices across Arizona, providing coaching, chart audits, and identifying opportunities for clinical excellence,” she shares. Additionally, AZPerio collaborates with dental hygiene schools in Arizona to coach students as they prepare to enter the workforce.

Her clinical work also involves assisting with advanced surgical procedures. “We help with LaNap surgeries, phlebotomy for PRP/PRF, pre-anesthesia needs, and perioendoscope treatment,” Sanders explains. This comprehensive approach allows doctors to focus on complex surgeries while the hygiene team manages preparation and support. “It’s about efficiency and achieving the best outcomes for our patients.”

Through her multifaceted role, Sanders is shaping the future of dental hygiene and contributing to high-level patient care at AZPerio.



Katrina Sanders
Feature Part 3

What Can Virtual Care Really Do?

While some dental issues will still require an in-office visit, a lot can be accomplished virtually. Through GoodCheckup®, dentists can conduct visual exams, offer advice, prescribe medications, and discuss treatment plans. Patients can upload images for review, ask questions, and receive guidance from the comfort of their homes. If more advanced treatment is needed, dentists can schedule an in-office visit as a follow-up, ensuring that nothing gets overlooked.

The Vision Behind GoodCheckup®

Dr. Sandor's vision for GoodCheckup® is clear: to break down barriers to dental care. "GoodCheckup will provide a platform for patients and dentists to connect quickly, safely, and securely, ensuring no one suffers from dental pain or disease due to physical or emotional barriers," she shares.

The app was designed with both patients and dentists in mind. For patients, it offers convenience, efficiency, and accessibility, allowing them to receive care without leaving their homes. For dentists, it provides a structured and independent platform to expand their practice beyond the traditional office setting.

Key Features for Dentists: "Your Office in Your Hand®"

One of the standout features of GoodCheckup® is its ability to allow dentists to essentially carry their office in their hands. Dentists can onboard new patients virtually, review medical and dental histories, access images and documents, conduct video consultations, dictate notes, write prescriptions, and handle billing—when you choose and without the need for additional staff. It's a comprehensive solution that empowers dentists to offer high-quality care, even remotely.

GoodCheckup® for Kids: Meeting the Needs of Young Patients

Pediatric dentistry is uniquely suited to Virtual Care, and GoodCheckup® Kids was developed to provide on-demand dental advice and care tailored to young patients. From providing guidance on prenatal dental health to offering virtual consultations for toddlers and children, the app offers a convenient alternative to in-person visits, especially for parents with young children.

Dr. Sandor emphasizes the benefits of this service: "The convenience of not needing to swaddle a baby and travel through inclement weather for a valuable conversation with your dentist is undeniable." In cases of dental trauma or infection, the platform also offers timely advice, which can be critical for young patients, especially when local emergency rooms aren't equipped to handle dental issues.

Supporting Caregivers with GoodCheckup® Caregiver

GoodCheckup® Caregiver addresses the challenges faced by individuals in long-term care settings, such as nursing homes. Caregivers can use the app to connect with dentists on behalf of their patients, providing them with access to dental care that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. The app offers a lifeline for patients with limited mobility, ensuring they receive timely advice and care when needed.

The Role of Technology in GoodCheckup®'s Success

GoodCheckup® leverages real-time and offline virtual consultations to accommodate different patient needs. For non-urgent concerns, patients can submit questions and images for their dentist to review at their convenience. For more pressing issues, live virtual visits allow for real-time discussions and immediate feedback.

Accessibility is another key aspect of the platform. GoodCheckup® works via cell phone, eliminating the need for Wi-Fi and making it available in areas with limited connectivity. This helps to break down geographical and socioeconomic barriers, ensuring more patients have access to dental care.

A Growing Impact

The dental community has responded positively to GoodCheckup®, with a growing number of clinicians integrating it into their practices. The platform's ability to offer flexibility, independence, and new revenue streams has been a key driver of its adoption.

Looking ahead, Dr. Sandor is excited about the future of GoodCheckup®. "We have many new and exciting features in development," she hints, including innovations in at-home diagnostics and care provision using AI technology. With Virtual Care rapidly evolving, GoodCheckup® is at the forefront of this transformation, making dental care easier, more accessible, and more convenient for patients and providers alike.

GoodCheckup®: Your Office in Your Hand®. Get started today and experience the future of dental care. Learn more at goodcheckup.com



Balancing a demanding position with personal passions can be challenging, and Katrina Sanders is refreshingly candid about the fact that she hasn't quite figured it out yet. "When I do, I'll let you know," she laughs. However, she is deliberate in creating routines that help her navigate the constant ebb and flow between professional commitments and personal passions.

One of her key strategies is self-care. "I wake up in the morning and instead of hitting my email inbox, I set aside time every single day for journaling, creating an opportunity for personal reflection," she shares. This practice allows her to ground herself before diving into the day's demands. Another staple in her routine is exercise. "I'm an avid jazzerciser, so I jazzercise as frequently as I can," Sanders says, highlighting the role of physical activity in maintaining her energy levels.

Her two dogs also play a significant role in helping her manage stress. "In between stressful meetings, I'll step aside, grab one of my dogs, and we'll run around and play," she explains. Living in Phoenix, she often dips her toes into the pool just to take a break and reset.

Katrina's husband, who also works with her as her Chief Operating Officer, accompanies her on most of her work trips. This dynamic allows them to enjoy some of the beautiful locations her career has taken them to, including Napa Valley, Jamaica, and Aruba. "If we are in a city we really want to explore, we do," she says, grateful for the opportunity to merge work and personal adventures.

However, the true source of balance and renewal for Sanders comes from her humanitarian work. "That's where my soul overfills to the brim," she shares. Whether it's working with underserved communities just across the border in Mexico or in tribal areas of Rwanda, it's through service that she finds gratitude, humility, and balance. "The best way I've found balance is through stepping away from all the noise just to serve."

For Sanders, these humanitarian experiences provide a sense of purpose and meaning that recharges her both emotionally and spiritually. They serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of her work, not just within the U.S. but globally. By contributing to communities with limited resources, she's able to step back and reflect on the broader impact of her work, giving her the energy to continue her journey.



TUESDAYS WITH BOB: PROFOUND ADVICE FROM DAD

Every morning since the day I launched my first business, I have the same routine. I enjoy a hot cup of coffee, sit in my office with my dogs and journal. I know it may sound woo-woo, but to be completely honest, journaling has afforded me the opportunity to reflect on so many vital aspects of my life and my business.

I journal about things like my body and wellness, my devotions for the day, reflecting on daily affirmations; I look at how my month has felt, what is working, what needs to change, what fulfills me, what I want to focus on, intentions I set for myself, discussing actions I will take, identifying nourishing thoughts and ultimately, expressing gratitude.

This morning, however, something just wasn't sitting well with me.

Either it's the extreme need for an eyebrow wax, the knots in my back that a massage therapist SHOULD be taking care of or perhaps it's the DIY mani/pedi that needs the touch of a skilled professional that irked me, but either way, something just didn't feel right.

I was holding onto a nagging feeling in the pit of my stomach. Like many of us, I have Marie Kondo-ed not only my home but also my business and have been incredibly reflective of the things that simply do not bring me joy; I hold onto them, then release them. For anyone who has observed a Netflix episode or two of Marie Kondo's work, we know that the more we release what isn't working, the closer we hold onto the things that truly matter.

As I was Marie Kondo-ing my email inbox this morning, I came across some troubling thoughts and like any responsible business-owner with a graduate degree and a few accolades to her name, I did what any self-respecting, mature woman would do: I called my Daddy.

A widower living in central Wisconsin with a daily routine of walking his dog and dabbling in a bit of day-trading, my Dad is THE iconic Midwest Dad. Although he's still learning how to use his iPhone and has no clue how social media works, he is still the smartest man I know for so many reasons, and this morning's coffee with Dad was no exception.

I called him, and because I'm clearly the greatest joy in his world and the brightest light of his life (just kidding), he answered. "What's wrong honey? You sound down today..." Dad asked.

And just like that, I felt like that young little freckle-faced girl who used to climb onto a kitchen chair and sit across from Dad asking for help with her Math homework, or that seemingly independent young adult who kicked out the kitchen chair to sit across from Dad to ask for help in completing college applications or, most recently, the mature 30-something woman who now sat clear across the country from Dad but still needed him.

"Daddy, I'm confused..."

and just like that, I unloaded on him.

I shared with him my fears, my thoughts, my hopes, my concerns, my ambitions, my anxieties...

Like the ice crumbling over Lake Michigan under the spring sun or the tell tale crack of a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon opening on Super Bowl Sunday, the shatter of my "wall", the "strength" I had built came crashing around me in the face of comfortability. I knew that no matter what I said, he would still love me and protect me.

And THAT is what I needed most. His guidance, his protection, his honesty, his insight, and his listening ear. Despite the years of advice he's provided to me, he never fails to amaze me with the things he says and so here it came: Dad's words of wisdom:

"Katreene (Dad's nickname for me), you gotta take the good with the bad; and if I know YOU, I know you'll learn a lot more from the bad, you'll take it, grow from it, and use it to make your work even better"

Just like that, he put it all into perspective.

He's right.

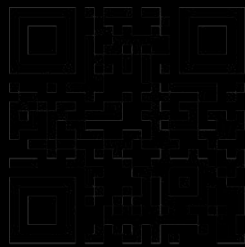
It's the mistakes I have made that have taught me the most about myself. It's the dark moments that helped me find my light. It's the uncomfortable times that forced me into a different comfort zone and it's the low points that truly made me feel grounded.

I reflect on the fear, hysteria and uncertainty of these times; and I realize that Dad is a true Wizard with his words; just like Dorothy, I've always had it in me. Dad reminded me that I am a magnet for miracles, that my ability to adapt, focus and get creative are solid reminders that I have a brain, my heart is full and I have the courage to face all of my fears.

While I may not have Toto with me, I have four four-legged trusty sidekicks loving me along the way; all I need to do is ignore the flying monkeys and shashay down the yellow brick road I've built for myself; and ultimately, that with a click of my iPhone, I am reminded that there truly is no place like home!

Thank you, Daddy, for continuing to be the best human I know.





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