



Journal *of the* American College *of* Dentists

The Dental
Assistant's
Perspective

Summer 2016
Volume 83
Number 3



Journal of the American College of Dentists

**A publication advancing
excellence, ethics, professionalism,
and leadership in dentistry**

The *Journal of the American College of Dentists* (ISSN 0002-7979) is published quarterly by the American College of Dentists, Inc., 839J Quince Orchard Boulevard, Gaithersburg, MD 20878-1614. Periodicals postage paid at Gaithersburg, MD. Copyright 2016 by the American College of Dentists.

Postmaster—Send address changes to:
Managing Editor
Journal of the American College of Dentists
839J Quince Orchard Boulevard
Gaithersburg, MD 20878-1614

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All claims for undelivered/not received issues must be made within 90 days. If the claim is made after this time period, it will not be honored.

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For bibliographic references, the *Journal* is abbreviated J Am Col Dent and should be followed by the year, volume, number, and page. The reference for this issue is: J Am Col Dent 2016; 83 (3): 1-24.

Member Publication
AADEJ
American Association of Dental Editors & Journalists

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- D. To encourage, stimulate, and promote research;
- E. To improve the public understanding and appreciation of oral health service and its importance to the optimum health of the patient;
- F. To encourage the free exchange of ideas and experiences in the interest of better service to the patient;
- G. To cooperate with other groups for the advancement of interprofessional relationships in the interest of the public;
- H. To make visible to professional persons the extent of their responsibilities to the community as well as to the field of health service and to urge the acceptance of them;
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Cover: Dental assistants play a unique role on the office team and they often see the practice from a different point of view.

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From the Editor

Just What Kind of Business Is Dentistry?

A few hundreds of years ago, all of health care was provided by women wise in folklore, gentlemen, and charlatans. Dentistry has retained the ethos of professional service, but few today have the independent means or hugely wealthy patrons to justify small thought to earning a living. Health care is now a business, amounting to almost 20% of America's GDP. The license is not an acknowledgment of a professional relationship: it is a commercial monopoly granted to individuals with specific qualifications who maintain minimal standards of safety in their practice. Cosmetologists and concrete contractors have them. It is a commercial relationship managed

This is an inherently uneven playing field for dentists and patients and will only become more so as the oversupply of dentists continues to grow.

by a state's Department of Consumer Affairs or a similar state body.

The dominance of the professional/commercial split personality in health care is only about 150 years old and was spurred by advances in research and technology that moved the professions from a dominant pattern of prognosis and palliative care to one of prevention, cure, and repair. In the change, health care embraced a technical definition of practice. Professionals are licensed and compensated based on interventions rather than outcomes. Practice acts define what professionals do, not what results they are expected to achieve. The standard of care is defined by commonly accepted procedures, not outcomes. Compensation is based on CDT4 codes.

So prominent has the business dimension of health care become that we now talk about both professionalism and commercialism. The two are spoken of as necessary characteristics of every practice. The competition between these goals is now regarded as intrinsic. One occupies the private and hushed discourse of the field, even to the level of organizations burying anything with a dollar sign associated with it in a proprietary cloak. At the same time, our public discourse is increasingly vocal about lofty professional abstractions and the promised "smile."

A market is a mechanism that governs exchanges. A free market

requires a large number of buyers and sellers with perfect information and freedom of movement. Obviously, health care cannot be a free market. Patients individually are unqualified to play a meaningful role. Licensure and regulation are intended to correct such market imperfections. There is no surprise that alternative forms of practice are fighting it out in the legislatures. The battle now is over the shape of the market. The solo practitioner serving a family of individual patients (the two-party model) is the ideal I grew up with and strongly embrace, but it is fading.

The four-party model is prepaid group benefits programs, commonly, but mistakenly, known as insurance. Employers, organized patient consumers, and other purchasers of benefit packages are the fourth party and they have significant influence on the market. Insurance companies negotiate with payers, large, well-informed group to large, well-informed group. The agreements among powerful equals largely determine the terms of the market. Dentists, as individuals, take or do not take such contracts in a secondary market. This is an inherently uneven playing field for dentists and patients and will only become more so as the oversupply of dentists continues to grow. Dentists are in much the same

position with respect to insurance that fee-for-service patients are with respect to dentists. Group practices and commercial DSOs may have some effect on making the few-to-many, uneven market more level.

The commercial relationship with the government is a simpler, three-party market. The government enters the market in two forms. They are the combined purchaser and insurer through Medicaid, and as such manage the most rapidly growing proportion of oral healthcare dollars. But dentists cannot negotiate effectively in this market, and most elect not to take the transaction on offer. The government has also carved out a small market segment, perhaps about 5%, where it is both the purchaser and provider. This is FQHCs, care for the uniformed services, Indian Health Services, etc.

Dentists customize their portfolio of markets, most striving for a balance of private pay for profit and opportunity to perform high-quality procedures, with insurance to ensure a stable income stream.

But there are also changes internal to the traditional two-party market. Many dentists are looking for ways to increase their market advantage with the individual patient. Advertising, practices with fictitious business names, salaried providers, and standardized treatment routines are examples of the commodification of dentistry. The essential characteristic is to exchange volume and standardized

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relationships for the personalization and long-term relationships of former times. The Internet is a vehicle, as are commercial DSOs. The goal is to make market transactions with patients “sticky.” Here are a few examples:

Deals. Sales, coupons, cents-off, rebates, prizes, and even chances at prizes bundle low-margin with high-margin services. The common feature of all these mechanisms is that they are temporary or situational adjustments to the standard transaction price which always remains fixed. The intent is to convert the patient to a pattern that is more advantageous to the provider. Deals are also an effective strategy to smooth fixed resource use. We would expect to see “free X-rays”

in the period between Thanksgiving and the New Year.

Branding. When customers are willing to pay extra for intangibles, we have moved to branding. Selling a car and a separate warrantee is a deal; putting the warranty in the sales price and then telling everyone about “elite customer service” is branding. So is decorating the waiting room with pictures of famous patients, putting up the “Top Dentist” certificate in its acetate display stand, and having the staff work the Facebook network and send birthday tweets.

Loyalty Schemes. A recent marketing adjustment takes advantage of points, rebates, Amazon Prime, and the like. The idea is to get customers to feel that they have already made an investment in the relationship that can only be redeemed through additional transactions. I recently saw an ad for membership in the dentist’s club for “select senior clients” that offered up to two free cleanings, X-rays, and a 10% discount on needed dental care for an annual membership fee.



The Dental Assistant's Perspective

The College, in conjunction with the American Dental Assistants Association, recently sponsored a contest to sample the way dental assistants look at dental practices. The question was, “Why is this office the best one to work in?”

There were many entries from across the country. They represented every form of practice configuration from large to small, solo practitioner to multispecialty, FQHCs, and educational programs. Only missing were commercial DSOs. They also came from every corner of America, with the noticeable exception that there were no replies from offices in large cities.

As you read these, you will notice similarities across the range of offices. Dental assistants are people people. There was nothing about instrument passing or X-ray safety training. It all seems to be about creating a culture that is welcoming and supportive for patients. Camaraderie and teamwork were often mentioned. Loyalty and career development were prominent topics. In some cases, the assistants had been with an office longer than the dentists.

And fun seems to figure in the job as well.

A representative handful of essays has been selected here. Read this issue and you will find some wonderful offices with dental assistants playing a key role.

Dentistry for Children and Adolescents

Sammi Stoehr, DA

Many kids hate going to the dentist. Parents tend to dread the anxiety and drama of a dental cleaning and checkup, especially if they have more than one young child.

However, there is a place in the St. Louis area where children can receive gentle, thorough dental care and actually be excited about it. They ask their parents when their next cleaning is, looking forward to it like Easter or a trip to grandma's. Parents can hardly believe it. They also can't believe how easy it is on them as well as their children. A family of five can get cleanings, X-rays, and examined by the doctor in under half an hour. Plus, if their appointment is at 10:00 a.m., all of their children will be in the chair by 10:02 a.m.

This is just a sliver of what sets us apart at the pediatric dental offices of Drs. Appelbaum, Dill, Varble, and Wong. Along with our stellar customer service and attention to detail, we consistently bring patients back on time, get them in and out within their appointment time, and most importantly, we get the patients excited about their oral health.

It Is about the Experience

The way we interact with patients and parents is our main focus. We always make sure we put them and their

concerns first. The doctors and staff are always willing to listen to any issue someone may have, and we do our best to work with them. If children complain about the bright lights when we lay their chair back, a pair of animal print sunglasses is on its way. If parents have concerns about X-rays or fluoride treatments or the pros and cons of resin versus amalgam fillings, the doctors are right there to answer their questions and help them make an informed decision. They are upfront and honest, and the parents feel confident in trusting them. And the doctors make their opinions available at all times. One of our doctors is always on call, even on weekends, for dental emergencies. Calling the emergency line will not direct you to an answering machine or exchange service; it rings directly to their cellphones. If there is an issue at the front office with scheduling or an unpaid balance, the kind and professional ladies that staff the front desk are eager to help. Even unpleasant situations and discussions are handled with finesse. We understand that no matter what the issue, everyone wants to be listened to, and we always exert extra effort to make the parents feel heard.

Everything about the design of the office is planned with patients' and parents' best interests in mind. Both of our locations are set up as "open bay" offices. The chairs for restorative work are separated from the hygiene chairs, but there are no private rooms.

One of our doctors is always on call, even on weekends, for dental emergencies. We understand that no matter what the issue, everyone wants to be listened to, and we always exert extra effort to make the parents feel heard.

Parents can always see their child and how they are doing. They are not only allowed, but also encouraged, to accompany their child to the back office. They are able to sit next to their child or watch from the bench, whichever it takes to make the child (and parent) more comfortable. The open bay also works for us with nervous children. Kids do not want to go through the unknown alone. They can watch older sibling or other patients get their teeth cleaned and see how easy it is. Patients as young as two years old frequently get in the chair for a full cleaning after watching an older

sibling do the same. Our larger office setup and staff is ideal for accommodating larger families, too. We have enough staff on hand daily to get a family of five or six cleaned at the same time so that we are able to get even a large family in and out within 30 minutes—an often unheard-of feat!

The language we use also plays a huge part in our success as a pediatric dental office. There is never a shortage of laughter in the office while we tell our patients to “open big like dinosaurs” while we “tickle your teeth.” The doctors elicit giggles with funny voices, actual tickles, songs, and jokes while children are in their care. Dr. Wong and Dr. Varble can often be heard singing songs from *Frozen* or “Wheels on the Bus.” Dr. Appelbaum and Dr. Dill employ funny voices, and the children find it hilarious when they count their teeth, “1, 2, 3, 7, 9, and 10!” One parent said that our doctors are “professional with the parents and appropriately silly with patients.” Even getting fillings done and teeth numbed and extracted is a breeze in our office with our calming and relaxed demeanor and kid-friendly language. We don’t “give shots” in our office; we “spray sleepy juice.” We don’t “drill,” we “sparkle,” and “clean out the sugar bugs.” We don’t “pull” or “extract” teeth, we “hug” and “give wiggles.” We feel a great deal of pride and accomplishment when we are able to coax a nervous child into doing something they are anxious about, and have them smiling when it’s over.

Comprehensive Service

Along with children and adolescents, we specialize in dental treatment for special needs patients. There are many patients in our office that, prior to seeing us, had felt as though they’d exhausted every resource, seeing family dentists and even other pediatric dentists in the area to no avail. They are thrilled upon finding our office and our methods of dealing with patients that need extra help.

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One parent sang our praises after being referred to sedation dentistry by several other dentists in the area, saying, “Dr. Dill and his very talented staff actually know how to deal with and care for kids with difficult special needs.” Many families have been pleased that they can bring their children to our office, rather than deal with inconvenience and gravity of putting a child under sedation for a dental cleaning.

Another added perk of our office is our affiliation with Varble Orthodontics. Having a talented orthodontist in the same office as their children’s dentist is a convenience that many parents in our practice greatly appreciate and take advantage of. We are able to coordinate with their office easily about scheduling appointments,

sharing X-rays and treatment recommendations. Also, their team environment meshes well with ours, and we have great chemistry with their staff as well.

Our excellent standards of customer service are continued from the back office to the ladies at the front desk. A smile greets parents when they walk in, where we are happy to assist with updating insurance information and can do so within minutes. At checkout, we explain to parents exactly what they are being charged for and go over treatment plans line by line. Accommodating children’s busy schedules becomes a breeze when making appointments; our ladies are experts at it. Friendly voices answer the phone—not an automated system—and are ready to help with anything from billing questions to scheduling conflicts. If you need to make a call during your lunch hour, after work, or on a Saturday, someone will always answer the phone. Questions about the enigma that is your insurance company? Our front desk is happy to help, and they have years of experience in dealing with insurance to help clear the fog.

Communication All the Way Around

The way we communicate with our patients is only half of our secret to success. The other half is our team and the way we communicate with each other. In our practice, there is no such thing as “your problem” or “my patient.” Every child that walks through our doors is everyone’s responsibility. This creates an atmosphere of “we” rather than “me” or “mine.” We collaborate

on everything, from getting X-rays and doing cleanings, to assisting the assistant on the operatory side if necessary. It is truly a team effort, from the front office to the back. Every morning, the whole team participates in a morning huddle, where we go over our day and make sure that everyone is on board with how the day will run. We end on a note of encouragement and inspiration, ready to take on the day together. Also, we have a monthly staff meeting where we talk about our accomplishments as a team and honor those that shined especially bright that month. The team atmosphere is bolstered by the fact that we are friends with our co-workers as well. There is a great sense of camaraderie among the staff, and it shines through to our customer service. We have great chemistry and are glad to come to work, which the patients can sense in our demeanor. It's easy to greet everyone with a smile when you've just been laughing with your teammates.

It's not often that small children are excited to come to the dentist, but that is the goal we hope to achieve. We purposely cultivate an environment to get them to enjoy their visits as much as possible; rather than just tolerate them. It begins in our waiting areas, which are designed to calm and distract. Our Creve Coeur, Missouri, office has an aviary, where anxiety melts away at the sight of the little birds. Our back office is clean and colorful, with inflatable prizes and the resident stuffed animals brightening up the corners. Seasonal decorations hang from the ceiling and walls regularly. Heading up to checkout is our prize box, an incentive that no child forgets. There is always a monthly contest going on as well, where children can enter to win prizes while their parents check out and

schedule their next appointments. Don't forget to pick up a coloring page on your way out of the door!

Opportunities for advancement in this practice are limited, but there are always chances to take on additional responsibilities and train new employees. The practice also offers webinars and seminars to keep our customer service skills honed. Our manager attends conferences to network with other offices and is always looking for ways to improve our team. Guest speakers are often invited to our monthly staff meetings to introduce the staff and doctors to new and innovative products. The doctors keep their dentistry skills sharp by taking continuing education courses and reading articles about the latest materials and techniques to better care for their patients. Anytime an assistant has an idea to better the practice, it is welcomed and carefully considered by the doctors and management.

It's not always easy to discuss finances, but it would be a disservice to not cover the financial philosophy of this practice. Any product that we sell in our office, from electric toothbrushes and whitening strips to prescription toothpaste and orthodontic flossers, is sold at our cost. We want to offer our patients the best products for maintaining their dental health at home and don't feel we should profit from that. Nitrous oxide is provided to our patients at no cost to them. We have negotiated with many insurance companies to become in-network with them, for the convenience of our patients. One of the doctors always tells the story about when he was interviewing at practices



in the area. Every one of them talked dollar amounts and bottom lines. This practice was the only one that talked about caring for the patients and putting them first. The doctors continue this philosophy into our day-to-day practice, and will do their best to work with patients without insurance or a high-unpaid balance. The care always comes first.

Our communication skills, special training, excellent doctors, and team atmosphere are the keys we use to care for our patients through their childhood and adolescence. We build relationships with them, by getting to know them while we take care of them. Parents frequently ask jokingly if they can come to us for their dental care as well, and dread the day when their child ages out of the practice. It is entertaining to find in the chart of a teenage patient that they were upset for their first visit, or a picture they drew for the doctor when they were five years old. It is evident that these doctors truly care for their patients, and vice versa. Dr. Appelbaum has been caring for children and practicing dentistry for over 32 years. Now, some of his first patients are bringing in their own children, having enjoyed the care they received so much as children. It is a sincere compliment and great honor to be trusted with a second generation of patients. ■

The Practice of Dr. Edward Denholm

Kimberly Arny, CDA, CODA, MADAA

I could answer all the questions about what is unique about the practice where I work or what a great team we have (and it is, and we do), but first I'd like to share a true story.

We have a new patient that has had a lot of dental treatment. She presented with seven previous root canals, and unfortunately, when she came to our practice, it was an emergency visit to treat an abscess of the maxillary right second molar. I could tell she was apprehensive, and was making sure she was reassured that she was in good hands. As we prepared to anesthetize, she looks at Dr. Denholm and asks, "Are you going to give me a shot in the roof of my mouth?" Doc laughs gently, and said "Gosh, I'm not a fan of that either. I like to avoid it whenever possible!"

She received an infiltration injection, Doc passes the syringe back to me, and she says, "You're done?" He replies "Yep." She exclaims, "Best. Shot. EVER!" How cool, she is already starting to relax.

We completed the treatment, and were in the process of dismissing her, when she seemed confused. "You're done?" She began to cry. "This is the best...I've had awful dentists. I've had so much treatment, by people who just didn't seem to care. This was

great. I can't believe it!" I gave her a hug, and told her she was fine and that she is in good hands. At the desk before she left, she made sure to let us know how relieved she was that she had found us. Before the week was through, her boyfriend had scheduled an appointment.

It's about the Patient, Isn't It?

Another patient was referred to our office by a co-worker, who, when referred her to our office, said, "I bet you talked to Kim; she's my girl!" When the new patient and I were talking she gave me her friend's first name, and I knew immediately who she was talking about. She mentioned another co-worker, I knew her as well. We got to chat about how wonderful her co-workers are, and share some fun stories. Our patients are friends, and we enjoy seeing them and catching up.

We have a wonderful family that comes in, and the wife was in this week. She tells me to make sure and remind her husband of his appointment, because he's crazy busy right now. I grabbed my cellphone and we text him, giving him a hard time—complete with devil emojis—telling him he doesn't want to get on my bad side. His text back, "Never!" with an angel. How can you not have fun with patients like that?!

I feel that we make a difference every day in the lives of the patients we see. Sometimes it's a listening ear and a caring heart, other times it's

checking out the new pictures of babies and grandchildren. We care about them as people, not just patients. We've lost patients because of Alzheimer's disease, and have comforted the spouse, because we have felt that pain, and know what a challenge it can be to face. We've lost patients due to death, and feel that loss also. Many funeral visits, cards, and calls, making sure they know we're thinking of them, have happened. We rejoice when the children lose their first tooth, and post on our Facebook page. We watch them grow, and we get just as excited to see them, as they are to come to see us. We've taken impressions of newborn feet, and gifted them to the parents. If you ask me to name what we do to create great patients relations, I think it would be the fact that we listen when they talk with us, and we care about what is said. We remember where they were going on a trip, that they were getting ready to start a new job or that they were just getting ready to purchase their first home. It's not at all about the great patient relations, as much as it is the great patients. The people we see make it easy to care about them.

Dr. Denholm is not afraid of technology. Our client number with our software company is below 400. We research together, and he values my input with equipment and new innovations. We've attended many continuing education courses together,

both those given by the dental society and the dental assistant's society. Dr. Denholm is very supportive of my involvement with the American Dental Assistants Association, and pays for my membership. He is proud of my accomplishments, and is excited to know I'm on the last leg of finishing my mastership. When I receive the notification, he will be as proud as my husband because he has not only witnessed the work, but sat through many of the courses with me.

Customer service is important, as is scheduling. If you are in the reception area for ten minutes, it is a rarity. Our patients feel "spoiled"; we know them and genuinely like them. Many are Facebook friends, but more importantly, true friends, for whom we care. If you have a problem with your insurance, we make every attempt to help rectify the issue. We know the dates, the codes, and why the treatment was done. If we can't fix it, we definitely enlist the help of the patient, but normally it's a simple phone call. Wouldn't we all like the same courtesy extended to us as patients? When a new patient calls, I assure them they'll like Doc. He's normal, calming, and never talks down to the patients. He listens to their concerns, and respects their ability to determine the course of their treatment, after they listen to the options and recommendations.

It's Also about the Team

Between four employees, we have over 75 years of service with Dr. Denholm. The reason for the lack of turnover and our loyalty is in his character. We are respected for our knowledge and treated with respect. We work with him as a team, and we all take pride in how we interact with our patients and each other. One of my coworkers left to raise her sons and came back. She worked with another dentist in the interim, but came home to us. She says when Doc quits, so does she. She's been with others, and they cannot compare! I cannot imagine working without him, so she may be on to something!

I love each of my team members. My office family is there for me, and we depend upon each other. There's a lot of cross-training, everyone pitches in to help. If we run behind, another member of the team is making sure the sterilization load is run, or the room readied for the next patient. It makes a huge difference in keeping up with things. We all pitch in without attitude or grumbling. We've been in other offices with prima donnas; we don't need them in our team! When a team has been together as long as we have, we each can bring suggestions and they can be discussed and implemented, or shot down. The best part of working together is that if one cannot see an easy fix, we have another set of eyes to take a fresh look. Great ideas have come from every single member of the team,



Our patients are friends, and we enjoy seeing them and catching up. It's not at all about the great patient relations, as much as it is the great patients.

because each of us is willing to listening with an open mind. The best part is that those ideas always make work better for everyone. I would hate to lose any one of them; they each bring great skills and great personalities to the practice.

The office building is not that big a deal, it's not a million dollar practice in an exclusive community. Although recently painted, it's just a building, and doesn't stand out from others around us. It was chosen out of necessity, when our former building was purchased and torn down. When we moved to this building ten years ago, the transition was done, and the

a problem, creates another. We meet with the coworker and address it firsthand. Many times, what we perceive as a problem is simply a misunderstanding that needs to be communicated. If a person doesn't know there's a problem, how can they fix it? A problem is like an abscess; left alone it can fester and poison the whole body, even to the point of mortality. People are the same way, don't discuss what you have an issue with, and they think there's a problem. Problem grows without communication, because without communication, no problem can be fixed. Resentment breeds, discontent

what he used. The caller used the same equipment and materials and commented, "I use the same bur, and I was hoping it was something different, but I guess it's not something I can buy."

Many patients have moved away, and returned to the area, relaying compliments given about Dr. Denholm's work. We just had a patient come home from Florida to have a new denture made. He was given the denture on Thursday, but called on Saturday with the message, "I just had a steak, and a lunch at the clubhouse. Dr. Denholm is a GENIUS! I'm so glad I came back instead of having these made in Florida." We've had patients come home once a year from Peru for their checkups, rather than see a dentist there. That kind of loyalty is hard to find.

I honestly believe that it's not so much about the work, as it is about the people. Although they appreciate the customer service, the attention to scheduling, the help with the insurance, and everything else we do, they come because of our team.

I know that I am blessed to be in a unique situation of loving not only the career I chose, but in having chosen Dr. Denholm to work with and having been chosen by him to work together.

Our approach to dentistry is probably considered old-fashioned, but I don't believe that it is out of date. It's not "conveyor belt dentistry," where you get to the office, sign in because they don't know who you are, and wait 45 minutes past your (and that of four other patient's) appointed time. I know that we are not alone in our delivery of dental care, but in our patient's minds, we are the only dental practice they choose. We do not take the honor or trust they give us lightly.



Many times, what we perceive as a problem is simply a misunderstanding that needs to be communicated. If a person doesn't know there's a problem, how can they fix it?

office open again in four days' time, with our sales representatives saying it was the most efficient move they'd ever witnessed. Each of us took control of the area in which we'd be working, and made sure it was organized. When one area was done, we'd help another. What could have been a nightmare was a smooth transition. We weren't sure how many patients would follow, but were honored that many did.

So, how is the camaraderie accomplished? First, we treat one another with respect, if we have an issue, backbiting, instead of solving

grows, and the attitudes of the whole team are affected. There may not be a problem except in one person's mind, but a conversation of assurance can go a long way in making them feel better.

I'll not lie and say Doc and I have never had a disagreement, but all I have to do is say, "We need to talk!" and we immediately go into his office, address the issues, and move on. He listens and cares. He expects the same from us if he has an issue, which is only fair. Maturity is necessary to accept when you are wrong, and address a situation, but on both sides of the desk, when utilized, it makes a good working relationship better. He does not disparage us in front of patients; it's a private discussion, as it should be.

Years ago I had a dentist from Texas call to ask Dr. Denholm's technique for polishing amalgams. I told him

Family HealthCare

Tyler Winter, LDA, CDA, RDA

One of my first patients at Family HealthCare was an individual who worked in the Bakken Oil Field in western North Dakota. The patient told us he has a family of five—the two parents and three children. The patient was working away from home while his spouse worked as a server at a café in their hometown. As I was going to take an X-ray, the patient became reluctant to let us conduct an examination. He then covered his mouth with his hand and told us a story about how he had gone to another dental office. The patient told us how he had felt like the staff there was “grossed out” by his mouth and could hear the staff talking about him in another room. He said, “I am ashamed to show you my mouth. It has been years since I had dental work done. We don’t have dental insurance. All of our extra money is going to our kids’ dental work. One of our daughters has braces, the other one needs to have some teeth removed. Our kids come first.”

We responded by telling the patient that we are here to help regardless of circumstance and we are a judgment-

free zone. Our priority is providing everyone the best possible dental care.

This story is one of many that tell about the work that Family HealthCare dental does on a daily basis. As a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), we provide primary medical, dental, and prescription services to patients who may have nowhere else to go. We help the most vulnerable members of our society and those whose dental care is often overlooked, especially those who may be experiencing a gap in our social safety nets. Everyone is welcome at Family HealthCare, and this is why Family HealthCare is the best dental office.

Our Special Mission

Family HealthCare stands out from other dental offices in our area because it is an FQHC and it is the only health provider for the homeless in North Dakota and western Minnesota. We are based in Fargo, North Dakota, and provide services to the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area through satellite locations in West Fargo, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota. To support its role as an FQHC, Family HealthCare’s mission statement is, “To provide affordable, quality healthcare for every person.” Family HealthCare is a comprehensive medical home that provides primary medical care, immunizations, well-child services, reproductive health services, chronic disease management, behavioral health, and, since 1995, it

This is something unique to Family HealthCare: the dental assistant is the patient’s advocate and companion—we help them navigate what can be a convoluted process.

has been giving patients something to smile about—literally—when it expanded into dental services. These services are provided regardless of age, nationality, or ability to pay.

Family HealthCare began in 1990 when the Salvation Army opened a homeless health clinic. By 1994, demand had grown and the homeless health clinic became a full-service community health clinic known as Family Healthcare Center (which became Family HealthCare in 2012). We first housed a dental clinic in Fargo, North Dakota. It became apparent that additional dental space would be needed. Shortly thereafter, a second location opened in Moorhead, Minnesota. The Moorhead clinic is located in the Clay County Family Service Center. It has seven operatories, two full-time dentists, four dental assistants, and two hygienists. The



As a Federally Qualified Health Center, we provide primary medical, dental, and prescription services to patients who may have nowhere else to go. We help the most vulnerable members of our society and those whose dental care is often overlooked, especially those who may be experiencing a gap in our social safety nets.

Fargo dental clinic is located in the historic Pence Automotive building and has seven operatories (with plans to add an eighth this fall), three full-time dentists, two part-time dentists, six dental assistants, and three hygienists. Both clinics use modern electronic dental records, digital X-rays, and laboratory services. Patients, regardless of their circumstances, are able to access dental care and services that are otherwise unavailable to them.

Family HealthCare stands out from other dental offices because we are mission-driven. We live our mission to provide affordable and quality dental care to everyone through a variety of means. In addition to traditional dental insurance, we also accept medical assistance. This enables us to provide a dental home to people who may otherwise have trouble finding a provider that will treat them. We often see individuals who receive services in group home or individual standardized living arrangement settings who may have been turned away from other dental providers. For example, one individual we see has trouble managing appointments due to the person's diagnosis and has had too many missed appointments with other providers that accept medical assistance. We have been able to provide this person regular dental care for the past two years by working directly with his home support service provider to coordinate appointments. It is doubly important that people in this circumstance have a dental provider dedicated to their care.

For others who are without insurance options, we have an access plan that helps individuals and families receive dental care. Household size and income are used to determine the patient's responsibility on a sliding scale. Most services are eligible for the access plan. However, if the patient needs some that will not be covered, we make sure to notify the patient in advance and help them find additional resources to receive the care they need by meeting with one of our health insurance navigators. The navigator, part of the Affordable Care Act, can help the patient find insurance, work out a payment plan, or other options that may apply.

We want our patients to have a positive dental experience. We consider this to happen when the patient leaves our clinic feeling satisfied, knowing that we took the time to help him or her understand why their oral health is an important part of their total well-being. We can do that by being true to our mission statement, providing the services mentioned above, and by building relationships with our patients whether it be by being their dental home or by providing compassion, as to the individual mentioned in the introduction. Our patients leave our clinic knowing that our dental team is knowledgeable and is able to help them with their oral health needs; especially by empowering our patients to improve their own oral health. We encourage questions and provide our patients with oral health education through interpreters (11 languages, including American Sign Language, are available at no cost to the patient through eight in-house interpreters or Language Line), educational videos and brochures, cultural sensitivity, and dialogue with our providers.

The Assistant Is the Patients' Advocate

The secret to a well-run office is communication. Communication is an interactive process in which we are the senders of messages and we can be thought of as having authority based on our knowledge. Our patients look to us to help them understand what is going on during their visits and procedures, as well as to provide them with the knowledge they need to successfully manage their oral health. However, it is not as simple as just telling a patient something and supposing they will understand and make use of the information. We have to make sure our messages are effectively communicated through our behaviors and by being aware of the noise that interferes with what we are trying to communicate. Such noise can be a person being distracted by the sound of the drill in the room next to them, to anxiety for the procedure, to something that is occupying their thoughts. For example, we need to notice if there is a potential language barrier. Someone may say they are comfortable with English, when they really mean they have better comprehension of written instead of spoken English. By being aware of these kinds of things, we can make sure we are providing our patients information in a way that will have the most impact for them.

This noise concept is especially important when communicating within the dental team. We take steps to ensure everyone is on the same page by completing a timeout prior to procedures. We ensure it is the right patient, right procedure, right

area/tooth. At Family HealthCare, the dental assistant plays a most critical role—from the moment the patient gets called back for their visit or procedure, the dental assistant is the one person who is with the patient the entire time. We walk the patient back to the operatory, we go over the patient's medical history and document other relevant data, update anything that needs updating in the electronic record, and discuss what is going to happen during that day's visit. From there, we communicate to the dentist what the patient's concerns are (including any anxiety or other issues that may have arisen). We communicate throughout the procedure, and when it is completed, it again turns to the dental assistant to tie everything together by recapping the day's events, answer the patient's questions and concerns, and schedule any follow-up that needs to be done. We also discuss what will happen at any future visits at that time. This is something unique to Family HealthCare: the dental assistant is the patient's advocate and companion—we help them navigate what can be a convoluted process.

The communication concept is key to how Family HealthCare functions as a team. If the patient is "A" and the dentist is "C", the dental assistant is "B." Without "B", one cannot get to "C." We are the cog in a well-oiled machine—without dental assistants helping coordinate care, things can fall apart quickly. Dental assistants act as the dentist's copilot by knowing what the dentist needs before the dentist knows what is needed and by maintaining situational awareness during a procedure. A good relationship with the provider and clear communication is essential. A dentist may turn to us and ask, "Okay, where



am I?" We help the dentist by coordinating which room is up next, facilitating an understanding of what the patient's concern is and what the patient expects of their visit, and helping ensure that the right procedure is being done on the right person.

Building the Team

Family HealthCare is not only booked with scheduled appointments, but we also accept walk-ins. It is critical that we are all communicating at all times. We have regular dental staff meetings and a frequent contact with our appropriate leads. This helps ensure each dental team member is on the same page and is working up to his or her full potential.

Every person has the opportunity to participate in our clinic—patients included! As a FQHC, Family HealthCare is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors where over half of the board is made up of actual patients. Board members have diverse backgrounds in fields like community leadership, business, finance, healthcare, and academia. Employees participate in our clinic through engagement with our administration. Our chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and chief financial

officer have a monthly coffee klatch that is open to all staff. Here, staff are welcome to visit with Family HealthCare's leadership and exchange information. Leadership is dedicated to their open door policy and provide multiple channels for communication and participation.

The strong representation of patients on our board demonstrates that patient care and satisfaction is a paramount value. While board representation furthers our mission statement and dedication to patient care and satisfaction, we take additional steps in this pursuit. We gather data concerning patient satisfaction via a written survey instrument, telephone conversations, or in-person engagement. These data help management determine program goals and process improvements. Board representation, data gathering, community engagement, and maintaining trust help us build and maintain good customer relations.

As a dental practice that strives to be a dental home to those in underserved populations, we really get to know the individuals that come to us for dental care, and this is one thing patients report loving about our practice. We take the time to engage our patients, or if they have support staff with them, work with their staff to better serve the patient. We get to know the individual's preferences and fears. Patients report that they have been impressed by our staff's ability to recall details about the people we serve. A hygienist was recently cleaning a patient's teeth and visited with the individual about them moving into their own apartment and getting a Batman blanket once they

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moved—something that the patient had indicated they wanted to do at an appointment six months prior. This helps patients feel valued, at ease, and involved in their care.

Family HealthCare values education and career advancement. Each year, employees work to complete their continuing dental education requirements. Family HealthCare provides staff with a continuing education allowance that helps cover the costs related to continuing education. Our dedication to education and advancement means that we can learn something new and then teach something new to our fellow employees and to our patients. Currently, I am in pursuit of becoming a Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC) through Rio Salado College. This will enable me to help Family HealthCare reach out to communities that have trouble accessing dental care for reasons in addition to low income like language, education, culture, or place of abode. I will have the additional training and education needed to develop community-based oral health programs, prioritize patient groups, provide preventative services, collect diagnostic data, and other related tasks. Family HealthCare supports this effort by providing encouragement, mentorship, supervision, and the ability to undertake a project-based internship. Family HealthCare fully

believes that an employee's will to learn and improve oneself via education is crucial to helping us meet our organization's mission and our patients' needs. Additionally, at any given time in our dental office, Family HealthCare is supporting dental education programs in the area by providing internships for dental assistants and hygienists. Students fulfill their internship requirements and leave with a better understanding and knowledge of what FQHCs do and the critical role we play in our patients' lives, in addition to the knowledge needed to fulfill their career goals.

Every dental office has its own qualities, but I am very fortunate to work for Family HealthCare. Family HealthCare is a unique organization dedicated to providing comprehensive medical and dental services to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay. We look to our mission in everything we do, whether it is helping our employees undertake career development, or providing compassionate care for people who may have nowhere else to go. I am grateful for the opportunity to help a diverse patient population and for the variety each day presents. Family HealthCare is the best dental office because every person matters. ■

Northridge Dental Group

Kristy S. Borquez, CDA, RDAEF

I have worked at my dental office for 42 years. I began my career as a dental assistant two weeks after graduating from dental assisting school. I was hired at Northridge Dental Group on July 1, 1974, and worked with Dr. Stephen Goldberg for 31 years, up until the time he retired. We had a great partnership. I learned so much from him, more than could be taught in a school setting. We had a great interaction with each other and with the patients, making them feel relaxed and looking forward to the new banter we would create. Our patients actually looked forward to their dental appointments.

Good Foundation: Long and Solid Career

When I began working as a dental assistant, California did not have state licensure; that actually came into existence in 1976. I was among the first 350 people to take and pass the state licensure exam to become a Registered Dental Assistant (RDA). All of the assistants in my office took the test at that time. It was expected that we would continue our education to be the best that we could be in our field. In 1993 I asked Dr. Goldberg for his support as I began a course to become a Registered Dental Assistant in Extended Functions (RDAEF). Since the doctors were required to

Since students are graded in how well they work with their patients, the “patient first” mind set is stressed at all levels and every semester.

attend courses in conjunction with their assistants, it was important to have a supportive doctor. He came through with flying colors, supporting my effort to become a RDAEF both technically and financially. The office, and he personally, helped me to finance the course and find patients for my clinical exam. He did the needed treatment on my clinical patients at no charge. I am proud to say I became an RDAEF in December of 1993.

Dr. Goldberg partnered with Dr. Sherman Chessler and Dr. Alan Wasserstein to form a group practice in December of 1973. There were not many group practices in the early 1970s, so our office was always singled out. They built a state-of-the-art 12-operatory practice with beautiful views from all of the treatment rooms. There was a large, well-thought-out sterilizing area for that time, a spacious staff lounge, and a large working laboratory where we made our own crowns and bridges. I learned a great

deal from the lab technicians we employed. Back in the day, general doctors did everything. So, I was well-versed early on in the areas of restorative dentistry, prosthodontics, periodontics, endodontics, and oral surgery.

I became a student member of the ADAA in 1974, while in dental assisting school. At the time of my interview with Dr. Goldberg, I was told that my employers would pay my ADAA dues and would support me in my continuing education efforts. They were definitely forward thinkers. They were all members of the local dental society and knew the importance of professional associations. I had additional benefits that included profit sharing, vacation days, sick days, uniform allowance, overtime after eight hours (even though we only worked a four-day week), medical insurance, free dental treatment, discounted dental treatment for my parents and other family members, and all national holidays off with pay.

Flexibility and Transition

No office is perfect, and we had our fair share of conflicts throughout the years, but we always worked it out and came through with a stronger and better working relationship. Any job involves a great deal of give and take. It always comes down to teamwork. Everyone has to know what their

responsibilities are; they need to do them to the best of their ability; they need to continue to better themselves in their given field; and everyone needs to look out for each other. The main focus should always be the care and comfort of the patient. That may mean that you go to lunch late, or get no lunch at all—basically you do what needs to be done to be sure the patient is getting the best treatment possible. Flexibility is a trait that I believe is just as important as teamwork. They really go hand in hand.

After a few years I became the clinical coordinator and supervised the clinical aspects of office. I made sure all new dental assistants were trained properly in X-ray exposure techniques, infection control, four-

handed dentistry, laboratory duties, interaction with patients, and chairside computer skills. I reviewed the expectations of the doctors and helped my co-workers in any way needed. I maintained the schedule of assistants, being sure that all doctors were adequately staffed on any given day. I was also in charge of ordering supplies from a variety of vendors, conducting weekly spore testing on all sterilizers, organizing CPR courses, and generalized patient flow. I was also known to clean out plaster traps, change ceiling light bulbs, do minor equipment repairs, and whatever else needed to be done.

In 2001, Drs. Chessler, Goldberg, and Wasserstein made the decision to sell their practice after nearly 30 years of working together. They were very particular when it came to potential candidates to sell their practice to. They wanted to be sure that their patients would continue to get the best treatment possible. After careful screening of many doctors, they elected to sell their practice to Dr. Shahdad Arami (general dentist) and Dr. Farshid Ariz (periodontist). On April 1, 2001 they officially joined their practices and began their new lives at Northridge Dental Group.

As a staff, we were concerned with a shift in ownership because we heard horror stories of offices that were sold and all of the employees let go. Luckily, our new doctors recognized the need for quality and consistency in their staff for a smooth transition. Having the confidence of their new patients was paramount. And so, after 27 years of employment, I began the second stage of my life at Northridge Dental Group. Dr. Wasserstein retired immediately, Dr. Chessler worked for one additional year and Dr. Goldberg worked an additional four years. When he announced that he would retire in September of 2005, I was

devastated. I could not imagine working without him. We were a team and had been together for 31 years. I had always said when he retired I would have to retire, but seeing as I was no way near retirement age, that did not happen.

Dentistry beyond Chairsides

Thus began the third stage of my life at Northridge Dental Group. I would assist the associate dentists, who were usually fairly new to dentistry. I was able to share my expertise and experience with these dentists to maximize the quality of treatment our patient's experienced. If anyone wanted to know how we did something in the olden days, they would come and find me (and still do).

I also began marketing for the office a couple days a week. During that time I organized an office Oral Health Day in conjunction with a local radio station, KFWB. Since they were the official radio station for the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team, they arranged to have Ron Cey, a former Dodger, attend our event. He helped to bring people from the community together so we could educate them in the benefits of good oral health. We had several tents with information and displays related to the various aspects of dentistry. We also had dental giveaways and door prizes. A good time was had by all! As an added bonus, I was allowed to record the radio spot advertising the event.

Amidst all of my duties, I learned many aspects of working in the front office. In 2007, my bosses asked me if I would consider moving to the front desk. They wanted a familiar face when patients arrived and someone who knew the procedures, could screen calls, and could explain

As a staff, we were concerned with a shift in ownership because we heard horror stories of offices that were sold and all of the employees let go. Luckily, our new doctors recognized the need for quality and consistency in their staff for a smooth transition. Having the confidence of their new patients was paramount.



I have been teaching dental assisting classes part-time since 1985. My office allowed me the flexibility of hours so I could teach ten hours a week at the same dental assisting program I graduated from in 1973.

treatment plans in depth to patients. My first instinct was to say no. I could not imagine leaving my clinical duties. I was a back-office assistant—I have my RDAEF! Then I began to look at the big picture. Perhaps it would be a good thing to expand my horizons and try something new. After careful consideration, I decided to make the change.

I could not believe how much there was to learn. I am sure many people think all the front desk staff does is answer phones and make appointments. Let me tell you, there is so much more to it than that. I especially enjoyed having a greater interaction with all the patients. We have a great rapport with our patients and often feel like we truly are one big family. That transition brought me to my fourth stage of life at Northridge Dental Group, as a patient coordinator.

The current regime is much different from the original practice that began in 1973. Though we had employed several associate dentists over the years, we now offer additional specialists in our office. Besides a full time periodontist, we currently have a part-time endodontist, an oral surgeon, and an orthodontist. We do not have a pediatric dentist on staff, but we see a great number of children in our practice. In the past, each doctor had two assistants and there was not much switching around. Now, all assistants are encouraged to assist all doctors, general or specialists. It makes for a

more harmonious working environment. We have two hygiene schedules per day and employ six hygienists. We will customize our schedules, as needed, if patients need an early or late appointment. We also offer at least two Saturdays a month for treatment. We have daily huddles at the start of the day and we have a two-hour staff meeting monthly. We have just implemented quarterly staff reviews. Employees are encouraged to offer new ideas for the betterment of the office and our patients. New ideas are discussed at the monthly staff meetings or sooner if indicated.

All team members stress the importance of dental health and how dental health can affect a patient's overall health. Dr. Ariz is currently treating patients with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) and temporomandibular disorder (TMD). He has had extensive training in these areas and is striving to educate all of our patients on the importance of treating these issues. I was selected to be a part of this team within Northridge Dental Group, the TMJ and Sleep Therapy Centre of the San Fernando Valley. It is very satisfying to hear patients say that we have changed their lives for the better.

I feel as if I have had several different jobs in my career as a dental assistant, all at the same office. I am grateful for all that I have learned from

the doctors I have worked with and the knowledge I have been allowed to share with up and coming dentists. It has been a continuous learning and growth experience. I have been teaching dental assisting classes part-time since 1985. My office allowed me the flexibility of hours so I could teach 10 hours a week at the same dental assisting program I graduated from in 1973. When that program ended I continued to teach for private companies. I was able to bring my first-hand knowledge of dentistry into a teaching environment. I find that I teach in the same style as Dr. Goldberg when he was educating a patient. The analogies he used I still use to this day. I stay current on the legal aspects of dental assisting and teach the occasional class on Infection Control as well as CA Dental Practice Act. I have been referred to as the conscience of the office.

In conclusion, I would like to say that after 42 years, I still love my job. There are always day-to-day challenges, but there is no place I would rather work. And I am grateful for the friendships I have maintained amongst co-workers over the years. So, "Cheers" to my Northridge Dental Group family. ■

Oak Park Dental Group

Jennifer Pierce

Often when people talk about the dentist you hear things like “I hate the dentist,” “I’ve had the worst experience ever,” or “the sight of needles and drills terrifies me!” Here at Oak Park Dental Group our mission is to change that language by breaking down those barriers, providing the utmost care for your smile, and surrounding our patients with a serene atmosphere. Oak Park Dental Group has been in business for 37 years and for the past three years has been a sister office of the network Chicagoland Smile Group.

Our mainstream office is unique, yet social media savvy. We consistently post on our very own Oak Park Dental Group Facebook page. We always post fun, humorous, and informational facts.

Unique, Individual, Personal

Oak Park Dental Group values respect, quality, teamwork, professionalism, and growth. Those values keep our team grounded. When a dental office lives by these values, without a doubt the office will automatically stand out. Dr. Megan Vouziers believes our office stands out because it is a multi-disciplinary office that allows patients to have complete comprehensive care. Patients can see a multitude of general dentists and specialist to create patient convenience as well as ease anxiety. Similarly, dental assistant Jennifer recalls an extremely troubled patient who had to get a tooth extracted. The patient was absolutely thankful and relieved when she did not have to deal with a referral. As a result, patients being able to stay in office is complementary, creates comfort, and ultimately leads to happy patients. Manager Antoinette and hygienist Connie validate the above with their input: “Our office stands out because our staff believes in above and beyond patient care.” The times when we take emergency patients, or serve a patient who is running late, or even staying past office hours to get a procedure done properly ratify the above. Dental assistant Rohan believes our office shines because of our staff who are genuinely interested in each other’s lives and the lives of their patients. He states Oak Park Dental stands out exactly because of our family-like environment. Moreover, our hygienist Piotr believes our office stands out

because our dental team is diverse. Our diversity allows us to think and relate better to the diversity that comes from our visiting patients. From the team statements above, one can see what type of practice Oak Park Dental Group is.

Our office keeps the art of being unique at our fingertips. To be an exceptional office you must singularly be involved, aware, and proactive. Our mainstream office is unique, yet social media savvy. We consistently post on our very own Oak Park Dental Group Facebook page. We always post fun, humorous, and informational facts. Our team even posts engaging team photos and exclusive educational videos, some created in the office. Furthermore, contributing and representing ourselves in positive causes, on holidays, and in our community makes our office incomparable. Dental assistant Jennifer remembers when our whole office wore pink to embody “wear it pink”—a compassionate awareness program for breast cancer. Our manager Antoinette and our hygienist Connie are like-minded team members. They believe it is our staff and employee diversity that display our uniqueness. They both trust our team talents and ability to care for each patient individually. Mr. Rohan states our office is unique in that we are able to provide the personal touch of a private practice while offering the best in dental care,

with the resources that come with being a part of a group network. Mr. Piotr our hygienist, believes what makes us a unique dental office is the office chemistry. He feels patients and office visitors can feel and pick up on the positive free-flowing chemistry that occurs in our office. Without portraying uniqueness you can create a dull, individualistic, and tiresome environment. Oak Park Dental Group strives to be innovative, acclimating to change, and remarkable in every step of the way.

Individuals Can Make a Team

Evidently, there is more than one secret to a well-run office. At Oak Park Dental Group there is no mystery to our secret formula. We mix in a little bit of leadership, brilliant management skills, teamwork, communication, and most vitally a single focal point of outstanding patient care. Our team demonstrates nothing less than these intangibles. A strong team approach with great leadership and a goal to concentrate on the best patient care is Dr. Vouziers's motto. Dental assistant Rohan states a well-run office is one where everyone is there to respect each other and be exceptional in their duties. Our hygienist Connie, who has been with the practice for 30 years, thinks that when everyone is on the same page, a successful running office is the result. Piotr our other hygienist discloses his opinion affirming, the secret to a tranquil functioning office is harmony. When orchestras play,

every single musician is in sync with one another to deliver an unforgettable symphony. The comparison is exactly the same in dental offices. Working with people you do not coexist with, cannot and will not generate harmony. This can regrettably be seen by other co-workers, new visiting patients, or regular office visitors. Running an office well takes a combination of the above attributes. Oak Park Dental Group entirely intertwines all these elements in one to assemble a well-run office.

The product of selflessness in the workplace, understanding that when the team wins, we all win, is extremely powerful. Our staff functions as a team in several ways, even through physical, mental, emotional, or competitive conditions. Physically, every morning we huddle as a team before the start of the work day. We go over our daily numbers, schedule, and any schedule concerns. Last but not least, we always end with two constructive inducements. First, we recognize, highlight, and point out an action a team member did the previous day. Secondly, we read a daily quote from our hand-made quote box filled with only team-inspired quotes. These activities keep our team motivated, while also giving our team something to look forward to. According to our manager, Antoinette, we are more than a team, we are a family. This is how we function as a



team emotionally and expressively. When you are family you are comfortable, loving, and thoughtful to each sibling. For instance, our team always celebrates birthdays. Purchasing a card we all sign and a cake illustrates the love our staff holds. Dental assistant Mario, says that every team member knowing their role in their job, doing it efficiently, and correctly, hands-down the outcome is teamwork. Connie, our hygienist, expresses that our practice pitches in wherever it's needed. For example, when a dental assistant sees one of the hygienists falling behind we actively analyze the situation and help out.

We understand we are a business; however, we also believe that if we are providing phenomenal patient care, the profits will take care of themselves.

Whether it is finishing up the patient with a coronal polish, taking X-rays, or turning over a room, the dental assistant is there. Trust and respect are key in an optimally functioning team. Trust comes with accountability on each individual's part and a willingness to always do better. Respect is more than a word it is an action. When you have respect for your co-workers you are courteous in everything you do and say. Our team always interacts and promotes enticement to expose our inner competitive sides. Chicagoland Smile Group regularly has office competitions with us. Specifically at our office, our team competed for best Halloween costume. The winner would receive a \$50 Target gift card. Ms. Iris, who is very artistically inventive, motivated, and competitive, said how cool it was to be a winner that day. Iris also states how she couldn't image any other offices being intimately involved quite like Oak Park Dental Group.

Positive incentives like this help mold and shape our team as well as getting to know all aspects of each other's character. Possessing team-oriented traits showcases the best in every player.

Most certainly, the contribution of each dental team member is a necessity, in the words of our hygienist, Piotr. Office visits can get overwhelming, with patient after patient, which requires the dental team to work together in completion of the tasks required for an efficient and friendly visit. Contribution and team function can go hand in hand. Patients have to rely on different team members performing tasks during every dental visit. At each step, each member has a responsibility to perform for complete dental health care. A dental visit is piece-by-piece progress, which consists of each team member contributing in order to make each appointment run smoothly and positively. Dental assistant Rohan adds, "Yes, everyone has a chance to contribute, and this is integral to a well-run office. Everyone must have a role that is important to the success of the office every day." At our practice, each team member knows his or her role, even switches roles, and at the same time sets aside ego for the sake of teamwork. For example, our manager may step in and help turn over a dirty room or seat a patient if she notices we are running behind. Or a dental assistant may step up and answer the phone if one notices the front desk is busy. Also, everyone has a chance to contribute thoughts, concerns, and questions. Whether it is being done at our morning huddles, monthly staff meetings, or our work emails, contribution is fundamental for every team member in any operation. Here, at Oak Park Dental Group, every team member adds to the value in our office.

All for the Patient

Our manager Antoinette specifically states, "Yes, patient care and satisfaction is a paramount value. We would not be as successful if patient care was not our paramount value. We understand we are a business; however, we also believe that if we are providing phenomenal patient care, the profits will take care of themselves." Dental assistant Rohan proclaims, "Patient care and satisfaction is at the forefront of each staff member's mind, each and every day. If everyone is working towards this singular goal then all other expectations should fall in line." Every Oak Park Dental Group employee compassionately feels patients are a priority and every patient's opinion matters. Hygienist Piotr exclaims "Each dental office, if successful, has become successful because they have optimized on satisfaction within and for their patients. Dental benefits allow patients to travel and visit any office they wish. Dental visits are proven to be the most dreaded health visits in the entire health industry. Fulfillment in our office must be met for the patient to continue to return and remain a patient at Oak Park Dental Group."

Patient care is such a paramount value that we extend our care to non-patients once a year. Every year Chicagoland Smile Group has a free dental day within our five networks around Christmas. Oak Park Dental Group is proud to be a part of such abundant altruism every year. This demonstrates our empathy, impact, and philanthropy as a dental office in our community. When an office can live up to supreme patient care and excel in consumer satisfaction, that is priceless.

One thing patients say they love about our practice is that it is universal. Dr. Vouziers truly believes this and states “It’s our caring and empathetic staff, from a warm and welcoming front desk to our calming and friendly hygienists and assistants. With competent and caring doctors, patients know they can trust us.” Our patients rave about our personal touch. Antoinette mentions how our office runs promotions that include our patients and that patients always can appreciate and love them. Dental assistant Jennifer states, “These are some of the common things I have heard from patients who love our office. They admire how the office resembles a spa, they love the friendly text reminders of their appointments and love our staff.” Embracing common remarks like these helps you realize the tiny perks your office has. Lead assistant Iris mentions that patients choose our office because they love reading our Google reviews and like our high ratings. Having high ratings is a bonus, especially living in a society where the Internet exists. Furthermore, Rohan states, “Patients love our ability to make them feel comfortable whether it is watching TV to get their mind off of procedures. Or wearing headphones to listen to music to block out sound. In turn, receiving painless and comfortable treatments keeps our patients pleased.” Our practice is addicted to consistently

When the team wins,
we all win.

creating an everlasting experience of quality care and showing patients they are our top priority.

To have great patient relations, we must have a great team. We create great patient relations by genuinely getting to know each patient, remaining involved with patients’ lives, and the community. Piotr considers patient relations to be different from patient to patient, just as each person is different in his or her personalities and needs. This type of mentality is step one when trying to assist, bond, and relate to the visiting patients. Dr. Vouziers voices how our office is great with follow-up calls on patient care, checking how they’re feeling, and doing post procedures. Actions like those indicate our team conviction, assurance, and profound upkeep. Connie our hygienist, reflects on how Chicagoland Smile Group prioritizes great patient relations by hiring employees with great people skills. Every team member, at some point in a dental visit, has alone time with our visiting patients. At that time the opportunity for companionship, learning, and gaining trust comes into play. At Oak Park Dental Group we know the little things count and we give our best with demonstrating that in every patient visit. Our hygienists especially share one of the key pieces of our patient relations. Their knowledge and affability is significant before handing out every single goody bag.

Getting Ahead by Helping Others Get Ahead

There are many opportunities for education and advancement. Continuing education is offered and required as a part of Chicagoland Smile Group. All offices frequently come together for team building and

educational presentations to enhance our knowledge in the dental field. Our practice has a “lunch-and-learn” practically every month. For example, manager Antoinette expressed we

Our practice is addicted to consistently creating an everlasting experience of quality care and showing patients they are our top priority.

have one person that has been with our company since April this year and has already been promoted. As Chicagoland Smile Group grows more networks, there will continually be more and more opportunities for everyone. The Chicagoland Smile Group is a network that gives every employee opportunities for educational advancement in the dental field by offering payment for any continued education classes in the dental field. Oak Park Dental Group recognized the individual continuing education efforts of employees. Founder and president Dr. Roshan sponsored all costs. That is what working for a great company is all about : receiving promotions, limitless opportunities, consuming benefits, and gaining knowledge. Those tangibles are the prescription to obtaining a preeminent dental office. ■

Century College

Beth Rynders, LDA, CDA, RF,
CPFDA, MED

Overwhelmingly, the students come back from those “real-life” experiences and can say things like “volunteering at these offices has helped to assure me that I like what I am doing and the reason I chose to go into dental assisting.”

I am writing about a very unique dental clinic. Is it part of the Century College Dental Assisting Program. It is a 12-chair clinic that is used for teaching purposes for dental assisting, dental hygiene, continuing education dental courses, and the “Dental Occupations” courses for the “916” district high school program which introduces students to dental careers. This is the largest dental clinic in this area of Minnesota.

We are fortunate to have a simulation lab with 20 “fake heads,” which allows the students to practice various procedures such as placing a rubber dam or learning to suction before they perform the procedures on “live” patients. In three other labs, students learn about, and practice with, materials, stone, waxing, and nutrition, to name just a few.

So, with 150 DA and DH and “916” students in the program at any one time, how do we manage a well-run office? The answer is communication and negotiation—and a lot of laughter. Recognizing that no day is exactly like the last, helps all of us to think on our feet and keep going. All of the faculty for both assisting and hygiene, have offices that are in close proximity, which allows for open communication. This teamwork is essential for day-to-

day operations, and especially for special events, such as Give Kids A Smile or Give Vets A Smile.

Additionally, dental assisting partners with the Union Gospel Mission in St Paul, Minnesota, and the Metropolitan State University Advanced Dental Therapy Dental Clinic, Maplewood, Minnesota, for students to have service learning opportunities. Here they learn more about patient care, communication, and patient outreach. Overwhelmingly, the students come back from those “real-life” experiences and can say things like “volunteering at these offices has helped to assure me that I like what I am doing and the reason I chose to go into dental assisting.”

Patient care is stressed at every level—be it a student working in another student’s mouth or a student giving nitrous to their dad, or students volunteering in a community clinic. The patient is always the most important person. Since students are graded in how well they work with their patients, the “patient first” mind set is stressed at all levels and every semester.

We are contributing to the student’s learning, but the students contribute to us as well. For example, since every student completes a set of internship experiences, they are our ambassadors out in the communities that they serve. We try to place them into offices that will benefit the student’s learning and goals, but the office may

also benefit from having an intern—and possibly a future employee.

The community dentists in the area trust our student's dental clinic practice, and we are very proud of that. Many students are hired shortly after they have completed their internships because the office and the dentist don't want "to lose them to someone else."

Patient and student communication, listening, and feedback allow for patient relations that are appropriate, useful, and understanding. Patients know that these students are still on a learning curve, and I believe that the feedback is honest. As instructors, we are always present to intercede, but because of schooling and learning, the students are prepared when they come into the dental clinic.

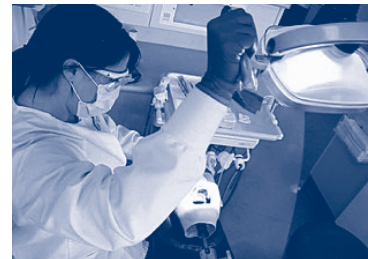
Over time, Century College Dental Assisting graduates have gone on to dental hygiene, dental therapy, and several have become dentists. We expect our graduates to be life-long learners and I tell every class of students that advances through the DA program at Century College, that they should also consider coming back and teaching dental assisting.

I love teaching dental assisting! Although I am lauding a nontraditional dental office, I believe that it functions in many similar ways to a traditional office. Things that we hope for in a

Since students are graded in how well they work with their patients, the "patient first" mind set is stressed at all levels and every semester.

dental office experience are taught to students on a daily and purposeful schedule. Of course, we acknowledge that every dental office does things in a manner that works for the office and that every dentist may use slightly different instruments and products. However, the basic things that make for a great office are also taught: patient care, teamwork, admitting mistakes and learning from them, and truly loving what you are doing.

Century College has a great DA program and a great dental clinic! ■



Cuba City Family Dental

We do not have staff turnover because this is such a great place to work.

Sue Andrews, CDA

When the new dental clinic was built in 2012, we told Dr. Matt, “If you build it, they will come”; much like that quote from *Field of Dreams*. Being the only dental office in our rural town of 2,200 in south-central Wisconsin, we are proud to accommodate patients from over eight counties in a tristate area. We can boast that 13 of our 18 staff members graduated from the local high school of less than 300 students.

Dr. Bob Schroeder, being the senior dentist of nearly 40 years, planned all along to entice a new young dentist by keeping current with technology, equipment, and adequate staff numbers. When Matt Andrews, a graduate of this very town, was doing his undergrad at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison, his plan was to go into the medical field. Dr. Bob encouraged Matt, (who was his patient) to consider dentistry. After shadowing Dr. Bob, Matt knew this was the way of life that would fulfill his dreams. Dreams of staying close to his family; marrying his high school sweetheart; raising a family; all while

being able to pursue his love of hunting, fishing, and farming. Dr. Matt Andrews joined the practice in 2010, and took over in 2012. Faced with the fact that we were growing rapidly, he decided to purchase a grassy lot from the city. Not exactly a corn field, but not far from it.

We have a very knowledgeable and caring staff, which has more than doubled in size, in order to accommodate our increasing number of patients. People love Dr. Matt’s attitude, wisdom, sense of humor, and generosity to patients and the community. Referrals to our office are the greatest compliment we could receive, and so part of our strategy is to continually accept new patients. Also, our staff goes above and beyond, contacting insurance companies on behalf of our patients, helping patients to use the benefits they are entitled to. We are able to break up a large treatment plan, and prioritize treatment in order to maximize insurance benefits, flex savings, and minimize out of pocket payments. We want to keep from digging a financial hole for our patients, so we are always upfront about fees. No surprises. We stick to the quotes given to patients and warranty their dental work, so they don’t pay for the same thing twice.

We support our local technical colleges, and we are honored to train and work with dental assisting students during their clinical experiences. We have hired five dental assisting students over the past five years. We do not have staff turnover because this is such a great place to work. Positions are

groomed for hygiene and assisting students, as well as front office personnel. Another unique position that allows us to see more patients is our sterilization specialists. The duties include cleaning of the operatories, sterilization of instruments, and lab work. This enables the assistants to move right along with the dentist to the next patient. And our most recent addition is a new dentist, Dr. Evan Pluym, who job shadowed our office during his undergraduate work. We kept in touch with him throughout his years in dental school, and enticed him to become part of our practice, as he is a graduate of a local high school in the next town over.

Our office has a small town atmosphere, with a big town feel. We offer many services, reducing the need to refer patients to specialists. Our staff of three doctors, four hygienists, four receptionists, five assistants, and two sterilization specialists, is all very enthusiastic about the profession and pride themselves with keeping current by attending webinars and continuing education courses.

One of the other things we do as a staff that makes our office outstanding, is having morning huddles, where we start with a prayer, remembering those patients that have confided in us of their upcoming surgeries, or their suffering loved ones. We send out sympathy cards, and even plants or memorials to the families when they suffer a loss and we lose a VIP (Very Important Patient). ■