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DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

Going Social



A FRESH APPROACH
& TO MARKETING
BRAND-BUILDING



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VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1

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The case for community water fluoridation

By Dr. Christina Rosenthal, D.D.S., M.P.H.

For more than twenty years, I've had the unique experience of practicing dentistry in an area where Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas meet. My patient base came from all three regions, which allowed me to see—with complete clarity—the difference fluoridated water makes in a community's oral health.

The contrast was unmistakable. Patients who lived in fluoridated areas consistently had fewer cavities, while those relying on wells or water systems without fluoride struggled with significantly higher levels of decay. But it wasn't just cavities. I also saw more periodontal disease in non-fluoridated communities—disease that led to loose teeth and premature tooth loss.

These experiences have shaped my firm belief in community water fluoridation.

I advocate whole-heartedly for fluoridation because it works—and because it's safe. Fluoride is simply a mineral. It's one of the most cost-effective public health measures we have, especially when implemented at the community level where everyone benefits.

I've seen the difference this one intervention can make, particularly for people who lack access to regular dental care. In many inner-city, low-income, or rural areas, dental providers are limited. When fluoridation helps reduce decay before it begins, families save money, parents miss fewer workdays, and kids spend more days in school instead of in pain.



STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

The Real Consequences of Untreated Decay

Sometimes people think of cavities as minor issues, but untreated decay can lead to serious, even life-threatening, infections. I often share the story of Diamonte Driver, a child from Baltimore who died from a preventable dental infection—one that started as a cavity in his six-year molar.

Tooth decay doesn't stay in the mouth. When infection spreads, it can affect the entire body. Dental health is whole-body health.

The Role of Education

In communities without fluoridated water, I've also seen lower levels of oral-health literacy—and I've seen it within my own family. When you're deciding between paying a bill and treating a toothache, extraction often wins because it's

cheaper in the moment, even though it causes long-term problems.

That's why education is key. When people understand the benefit of fluoride and see real examples of how it improves community health, change becomes possible. Education is our most powerful tool.

How We Move Forward

To protect and expand fluoridation, we need engaged citizens and informed policymakers. Identify your legislators. Share simple, clear materials that explain fluoride's benefits and highlight real stories of

preventable decay.

Form coalitions—dentists, pediatricians, and other providers can work together to demonstrate the positive impact fluoridation has on public health.

From my public health perspective, fluoride is one of the greatest achievements we've made. Its benefits should never be minimized.

And most importantly, parents must understand the seriousness of tooth decay. Once they do, they become powerful advocates—both for themselves and for their children.





What is the **Smile180** Foundation?

Learn the who, what, where,
when and why about the
Smile180 Foundation.

STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE. ►

THERE ARE NO SHORTAGES OF CHALLENGES WHEN IT COMES TO ATTAINING GOOD ORAL HEALTH IN AMERICA.

A healthy smile is more than just a sign of happiness—it's a catalyst for confidence, well-being, and opportunity. The Smile180 Foundation, by Delta Dental of Tennessee, embodies this belief by transforming lives across the state through the power of oral health.

At its core, Smile180 reflects the transformative power of a healthy smile to turn someone's life around. This guiding principle drives every initiative and partnership the foundation undertakes.

For more than 25 years, Delta Dental of Tennessee has been dedicated to giving back to the community that has fueled its growth and prosperity. Inspired by the

insights of then board member Dr. Carmen Reagan, the company launched a program of intentional corporate social responsibility, focusing on improving the oral health of Tennesseans. While many programs are directly related to oral health, others provide empowerment resources and education, broadening the foundation's impact. In 2014, these efforts were formalized with the establishment of the Smile180 Foundation, cementing Delta Dental's commitment to making a lasting difference in the lives of Tennesseans.

Delta Dental of Tennessee, through Smile180, is deeply committed to enhancing the health and well-being of communities by improving oral health statewide. The foundation supports a wide range of organizations, including Tennessee's

dental colleges, children's hospitals, free and reduced-cost dental clinics, and other like-minded charities. These efforts ensure that quality oral care reaches those who need it most, especially in underserved areas.

Smile180 doesn't just address immediate needs—it invests in the future of dentistry in Tennessee. By providing support and state-of-the-art facilities for the state's future dentists, the foundation helps ensure that the next generation of oral health professionals is well-equipped to serve their communities.

Smile180 has stepped in to help develop facilities that can treat children on location when they require dental care during a hospital stay, financially supporting the cost of equipment for Tennessee children's



5 With support from Smile180, Neighborhood Health hosted Celebrity Dentist Day, offering free dental care to kids in need while they got to interact with the celebrity dentist, former professional basketball player Brandan Wright.

hospitals. This commitment means that even the youngest and most vulnerable Tennesseans have access to the care they need, when and where they need it.

Oral care is a basic necessity, yet many Tennesseans lack access to it. Smile180 supports dental clinics that reach those who need it most, breaking down barriers and ensuring that oral health is not a privilege, but a right.

The Smile180 Foundation is more than a charitable arm—it's a movement dedicated to turning lives around, one smile at a time. Through strategic partnerships, investments in education, and a steadfast commitment to community well-being, Smile180 continues to shape a healthier, brighter future for Tennessee.

To learn more about the work of the Smile180 Foundation, scan the QR code below or visit DeltaDentalTN.com/Smile180



Smile180 funded a grant to open the University of Tennessee Health Science Center Pediatric Dental Clinic at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital.



Smile180 partners with PBS Kids to provide oral health education programming for kids across the state.



Smile180 awarded scholarships to University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Dentistry students.



Dr. Ruth

Braces by Dr. Ruth

Confidence in every Smile

How social media became a transformative marketing force for Braces by Dr. Ruth.

In today's digital era, even the most established healthcare providers are discovering the power of social media—not as a trend, but as a vital part of how patients learn, connect, and choose their care. For Nashville orthodontist Dr. Ruth Ross Edmonds, owner of Braces by Dr. Ruth, social media has become more than a marketing tool; it's a strategic extension of her mission-driven practice and a key to building authentic patient relationships.

What sets Dr. Ruth apart is her uniquely personal approach to orthodontics—a blend of clinical excellence, representation, and a deep-rooted commitment to community care. Her visibility both inside and outside the office has always mattered, but social platforms have expanded that visibility in ways that feel meaningful, accessible, and—above all—real.

"That visibility builds trust," Dr. Ruth said. "Patients know exactly who is treating them, what I stand for, and why I do what I do."

“

We use social media to build relationships—connecting with our patients, families, and the broader community in an authentic way.



Ruth Ross Edmonds, DDS
Orthodontist - Nashville

At its core, Braces by Dr. Ruth is a space built on connection, confidence, and culture. The practice isn't just straightening teeth—it's uplifting individuals and empowering future generations through representation, access, and education.

Social media, as it turns out, is the perfect vehicle for this mission. Rather than approaching digital platforms as pure advertising, Dr. Ruth intentionally uses them to humanize her practice and let patients see the people and purpose behind the brand.

"We use social media to build relationships—connecting with our patients, families, and the broader community in an authentic way," Dr. Ruth said.

Her posts spotlight patient milestones, team celebrations, educational insights, and the values her practice stands for. The result? A digital presence that feels more like community storytelling and less like marketing.



AUTHENTICITY THAT ATTRACTS

One of the most powerful outcomes of embracing digital storytelling has been the organic growth generated by patients themselves.

When patients share genuine experiences—whether a quick TikTok clip or a heartfelt Instagram testimonial—those posts carry a credibility no paid campaign can match.

Dr. Ruth has seen this firsthand. Families frequently tell her they found the practice after watching a video online—often one posted not by staff, but by a patient sharing a moment from their orthodontic journey.

It's proof that authenticity resonates. When real patients speak, people listen

HOW IT STARTED

Interestingly, Dr. Ruth's foray into high-quality digital

content began unexpectedly—with a silent auction bid that delivered more than just a website redesign. The company she partnered with helped overhaul her visuals, build her YouTube presence, and capture professional-grade photos and videos that showcased the heart of her practice.

The impact was immediate: greater visibility, stronger credibility, and improved searchability on platforms like Google. Potential patients began walking into the office already familiar with the space, the staff, and even Dr. Ruth herself—before ever stepping through the door.

"I've never looked back," Dr. Ruth said. "As our team evolves and our office grows and changes, I make it a point to keep our content updated. It builds trust, showcases your personality, and allows your practice to connect with people in a very real and

meaningful way before the first appointment even happens."

NEW STANDARD OF CARE

For many dental and orthodontic practices still hesitant about diving into social media, Dr. Ruth offers this straightforward advice: Just start.

"I've been in practice for 25 years—long before websites and social media were the norm. If I can get on board with it, anyone can," Dr. Ruth said. "It's never too late to start."

She often reminds younger dentists in particular that their digital fluency gives them a significant advantage. Social media offers a free, flexible way to build a brand voice, showcase expertise, and cultivate trust.

"Be creative, educational, fun, bold—or simple and



straightforward,” she says. “The key is authenticity.”

MOVING FORWARD

For Braces by Dr. Ruth, social media is not an optional add-on—it is an integral part of how the practice educates, inspires, and engages. It amplifies the values Dr. Ruth champions: confidence, representation, community, and care.

And patients feel that sincerity. They see the culture before they experience it. They feel connected before they even arrive.

In a field where trust is paramount, that connection is everything.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOP TIPS

1 MAKE THE COMMITMENT

Dedicate two to three hours a week to creating social media content.

2 MAKE THE MAGIC HAPPEN

Content is created during the workday, which helps the team to have fun while showcasing their individuality and engaging with one another.

3 ESTABLISH YOUR BRAND AND KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Determine what your brand is (or what you'd like it to be) and create content that reflects that.

4 INVEST IN EQUIPMENT

All you need to get started is a smartphone, but once you get things rolling, consider adding a tripod, ring light and wireless microphone to your social media toolkit to capture high-quality audio and footage.

New Delta Dental Groups

Atreus LLC	Ashland City
Framed, LLC	Brentwood
Mid-TN S&S Inc. dba Scissors and Scotch	Brentwood
Brand825	Brentwood
Julie R Merrill CPA & Associates	Chattanooga
Scenic City Pediatrics PLLC	Chattanooga
Beautiful Game Inc dba Chattanooga Football Club	Chattanooga
D&D Enterprises	Cookeville
Epic Solutions LLC	Cordova
Personal Care Services Midsouth	Covington
Grace Christian Academy of Leipers Fork	Franklin
Franklin Christian Academy	Franklin
Regent Surgical Health LLC	Franklin
Fiat Integrative Health	Franklin
LOGO Brands, Inc	Franklin
Monster Tree Service of Middle Tennessee	Franklin
Nashville Pizza Company	Franklin
Madison Swimming Pools	Goodlettsville
Hopewell Family Clinic	Hermitage
Provision Health Partners	Knoxville
Meta Enterprises Scan Store	Knoxville
Smith Handyman Service	Knoxville
US Architectural Millwork	Knoxville

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes the following new groups. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

The Muse Knoxville	Knoxville
Volunteer Driving Academy	Knoxville
JC Concrete and Construction LLC	Lebanon
Child Advocacy Center	Lebanon
Homeland Community Bank	McMinnville
Painting Unlimited Inc	Memphis
Armstrong Relocation & Companies, LLC	Memphis
Office of Basic Architecture LLC dba OOBA	Memphis
GFP-PV	Memphis
Ozark Motor Lines, Inc	Memphis
Colonial Loan Association	Morristown
CRE of Murfreesboro, LLC dba National Dance Clubs	Murfreesboro
Axis Direct	Nashville
Deep Roots Management, LLC	Nashville
Reliance Orthopedics LLC	Nashville
Great Clips dba LD Clips, Inc	Nashville
West Power Services LLC	Nashville
Skyline Manufacturing	Nashville
Barn2Door, Inc	Nashville
Ratcliff Chiropractic Office PC	Sevierville
CHIMES Preschool, LLC	Telford
Christian Community Schools	White House

New Delta Dental Providers

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes our new and returning contracted providers. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Tyler Robison	Antioch
Phillip Allagas	Arlington
Brandon Powell	Arlington
Brian Swann	Athens
Ewing Threet	Athens
Joseph Majekodunmi	Bartlett
Maya Scott	Baxter
Charles Foster	Brentwood
Alyssa Giannone	Brentwood
Jeffrey Dean	Carthage
Caleb Canada	Chattanooga
Lisa Djernes	Chattanooga
Thomas Harden	Chattanooga
Kaylyn McAllister	Chattanooga
Carey Nease	Chattanooga

Kush Patel	Chattanooga
Julianna Stanford	Chattanooga
Nicole Avakiants	Clarksville
Carol Bruga Tigner	Clarksville
Bradley Frey	Clarksville
Paul Kaneshiro	Clarksville
Leonardo Rios-Andersen	Clarksville
Antonio Roberts	Clarksville
Sami Sahloul	Clarksville
Nicholas Vlasnik	Clarksville
Nisha Zaver	Clarksville
David Lehman	Clarksville
Kela Bowman	Cleveland
Kevin Sivaneri	Cleveland
Katherine Bolding	Columbia

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Logan Campbell	Columbia	Shahil Patel	Lenoir City
Charles Hughes	Columbia	Janki Desai	Lewisburg
Beau Bolding	Columbia	Joseph Peters	Madison
Gerard Difusco	Cookeville	Mandy Olson	Madisonville
Paige Floren	Cookeville	Ericka Metayer	Martin
Elizabeth Houston	Cookeville	Royce Goza	Maryville
Dalal Abdulkarim	Cordova	Tommy Spears	Maryville
Erica Mathis	Cordova	Jasmine Anderson	Memphis
Gary Stillwell	Cordova	Justin Biam	Memphis
Krislyn Sills	Dyersburg	Macey Jackson	Memphis
Lyndsey Zito	Eads	Mayra Lopez	Memphis
Steven Miller	Farragut	Patrick Nabholz	Memphis
Aryagne Dos Santos Pereira	Franklin	Obiajulu Onuora	Memphis
Lane Griepentrog	Franklin	Kristen Puckett	Murfreesboro
Catherine Howard	Franklin	Alex Wilkerson	Murfreesboro
Deborah Simmers	Franklin	Hastings Williams	Murfreesboro
Jordyn Sparks	Franklin	Cynthia Americano	Nashville
Ian Turchan	Franklin	Chase Burton	Nashville
Sara Wei	Franklin	Heaven Graham	Nashville
Jessica Daiber	Germantown	Faraj Hasan	Nashville
Carlos Osorio	Germantown	Anna Horn	Nashville
Amanda Ashley	Goodlettsville	Marques Legier	Nashville
Nathaniel Hoang	Goodlettsville	Hyun Joo Lim	Nashville
Sagar Kumar	Goodlettsville	Zachary Nicholson	Nashville
Gloria Lee	Goodlettsville	Raj Patel	Nashville
Mikaela Maier	Goodlettsville	Spencer Roark	Nashville
David Payne	Gordonsville	Maryann Villalobos	Nashville
Allison Penland	Greeneville	Mitchell Weisgarber	Nashville
Marcel Acris	Hendersonville	Stephen Speck	Nashville
Manjita Gharti Chhetry	Hermitage	Nicole McKee	Nolensville
Jessica Williams	Hermitage	Caleb LeBorious	Oneida
Zalak Patel	Hixson	Bhumika Patel	Ooltewah
Jaden Cook	Jackson	Matthew Phillips	Ooltewah
Jorge Romero	Jackson	Daniel Carlson	Paris
Christopher Fortin	Johnson City	Jacqueline Ellis	Paris
Chantel Keller	Johnson City	Jonathan Elser	Paris
Kristopher Keller	Kingsport	Anita Brown	Powell
Su Maddy	Kingsport	Jacob Carter	Powell
Charlie Arndt	Knoxville	Tanner Gamble	Powell
Brianna Ball	Knoxville	Evelyn Teruel	Powell
Brittnee Bozeman	Knoxville	Emily Ingalls	Pulaski
Stella Kim	Knoxville	Megan Ward	Rogersville
Paul Liriano	Knoxville	Natalie Nord	Selmer
Chet Matsuura	Knoxville	Bianca Garcia	Sevierville
Jovie Nusser	Knoxville	Justin Wilson	Sevierville
Anthony Quitoni	Knoxville	Jared Fausnaught	Smyrna
Christian Reynolds	Knoxville	Hannah McGrew	Smyrna
Steven Simpson	Knoxville	Brice Roberts	Smyrna
Meredith Lloyd	Lawrenceburg	Kirulus Wifky	Smyrna
Brittany Simmons	Lawrenceburg	Joseph Upton	Spring Hill
Marissa Dopson	Lebanon	Kelli Gutter	Spring Hill
Jodi Hill	Lebanon	Veran Fairrow	Springfield
Zhanna Konovalenko	Lebanon	Ramsha Qaisrani	Waynesboro
Jacob Flyte	Lenoir City	Kolby Gregory	White House

POLITICS *THREATEN* SCIENTIFIC SUCCESS

BY JEFFERY W. JOHNSTON, DDS, MS | CHIEF SCIENCE OFFICER

Fluoride is the monatomic anion of fluorine, a naturally occurring element usually found as calcium fluoride. It is the 13th-most abundant element on Earth, commonly found in the ocean, groundwater and plants. Because fluoride is a negatively charged ion, it reacts with calcium in the teeth and bones. This reaction is relevant in the current conversation around the use of fluoride.

Community water fluoridation is “the controlled addition of a fluoride compound, usually sodium hexafluorosilicate, to a public water supply to achieve a concentration optimal for dental caries prevention.”¹

Fluoride was shown to be beneficial for reducing dental caries as early as 1931. Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first city in the world to fluoridate its drinking water on Jan. 25, 1945. Evidence shows that water fluoridation reduces caries by about 25% in children and adults.^{2, 3, 4} Earlier reports stated that dental caries were reduced by 65%. The drop in efficacy is due to the fact that there are fewer caries lesions due to sealants, fluoride from dentifrices, greater access to dental care and better emphasis on oral hygiene and diet. Based on systematic reviews of scientific literature, the U.S. Community

Preventive Services Task Force issued a strong recommendation in 2001 and again in 2013 for community water fluoridation for the prevention and control of tooth decay.^{5, 6} **Currently, 73% of the U.S. population (240 million) drink fluoridated water.**

Fluoride helps prevent dental caries in three ways. Fluoride makes the enamel more resistant to acid by substituting the hydroxyl ion in the enamel matrix with the more electronegative fluoride ion.

This process can also reverse early carious lesions. Fluoride also works by reducing the ability of bacteria (*S. mutans*) to produce lactic acid by inhibiting an enolase enzyme.

Finally, fluoride inhibits bacterial growth by glycolysis inhibition.

There are adverse effects of fluoride. The three most cited are dental fluorosis, skeletal fluorosis and cognitive impairment in children. Fluorosis occurs at concentrations above 1.5 mg/l (1.5 ppm), over twice the amount in fluoridated water.⁷ Skeletal fluorosis typically occurs when fluoride concentrations in drinking water reach significantly elevated levels, considered to be around 10-20 mg/l, with prolonged exposure over many years

being necessary to develop the condition.⁸ Cognitive impairment has been studied in peer-reviewed scientific literature. Brain development begins in the third gestational week. The developing brain is more susceptible to injury from toxins than the mature brain.

High fluoride exposure might be associated with negative cognitive outcomes in children. However, more longitudinal studies of high methodological quality are needed on this topic. Negative association between fluoride exposure and cognitive outcomes appears to be stronger at higher levels of fluoride exposure (≥ 2 mg/l) compared to lower levels (< 2 mg/l). The scientific basis for adverse nondental health outcomes is contradictory and inconclusive.⁹

There are also concerns with previous literature reviews. Child cognitive development is complex and could be influenced by several physiological and environmental factors. Poverty, nutritional deficiencies and inadequate learning opportunities are confounding factors. There is also inconsistent reporting of the cognitive outcomes across different studies using various assessment tools and units. None of the included studies considered other

factors in cognitive development, such as iodine deficiency, which represents the greatest single cause of brain damage globally. Iodine deficiency has been associated with a global loss of 10–15 IQ points at a population level.

Investigators from the United States and other countries have reviewed the scientific literature and have not found evidence linking community water fluoridation with any potential adverse health effect or systemic disorders such as cancer, Down syndrome, heart disease, osteoporosis and bone fracture, immune disorders, low intelligence, renal disorders, Alzheimer's disease, or allergic reactions.^{10, 11} It is important to note that fluoride from all sources is cumulative and should be considered. Along with fluoridated water, we ingest fluoride from toothpaste, plants and food.¹²

THE FLUORIDE CONTROVERSY

Proponents of water fluoridation see it as a question of public health policy and equate the issue to vaccination and food fortification, citing significant benefits to dental health with minimal risks. Opponents of water fluoridation view it as an infringement of individual rights, if not an outright violation of medical ethics, on the basis that individuals have no choice.

In August 2024, the National Toxicology Program released a report stating that drinking water with more than double the recommended limit of fluoride was associated with lower IQ levels in children.¹³ Following the report's release, several health care organizations spoke out in support of water fluoridation, citing evidence that **the U.S. Public Health Service's current recommended level of 0.7 mg/l of fluoride concentration in drinking water is safe and effective at reducing the risk of tooth decay.** A federal judge later ruled in September 2024 that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must address the impact fluoride has on drinking

water. After the ruling, several dental organizations, including the American Dental Association (ADA), reiterated their support for current fluoride recommendations. Opposition started in the 1940s. Conspiracy theorists claimed that fluoridation was a communist plot to undermine American public health. Organized political opposition has come from Christian Scientists, environmentalists, libertarians, the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, and groups like the Green parties in the U.K. and New Zealand.

Robert Kennedy Jr., in October 2024, said President Donald Trump would aim to remove fluoride from public water sources when in office.

In a post on X, Kennedy claimed fluoride is associated with arthritis, bone fractures, bone cancer, IQ loss, neurodevelopmental disorders and thyroid disease, but did not cite any evidence or studies.¹⁴

Despite the lack of credible scientific evidence, there have been recent changes in fluoridation policies. In California, U.S. District Judge Edward Chen ruled that fluoride poses an unreasonable risk to children at the current levels and ordered an EPA review of fluoride.

Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, MD, PhD, recommended against community water fluoridation due to the potential neuropsychiatric risk associated with fluoride exposure. He also noted the wide availability of existing alternative sources of fluoride, including toothpaste, mouthwash and fluoride applications.

Winter Haven, Florida, voted in October 2024 to remove fluoride from their water system by Jan. 1, 2025. The city of Naples, Florida, followed by voting to discontinue fluoridation in December 2024. Lawmakers in Arkansas filed legislation to repeal a state law requiring fluoride in drinking water.

The ADA has criticized the National Toxicology Program for using unorthodox research methods,

flawed analyses, lack of clarity, failure to follow the norms of peer review and lack of transparency.

The report relied on studies that used urinary fluoride to assess exposure despite a scientific consensus that this is not a valid biomarker for long-term fluoride exposure.¹⁵ Also, the report's authors acknowledge the findings were limited to fluoride exposures that are more than double (≥ 1.5 mg/l) what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends for community water fluoridation (0.7 mg/l).

The monograph emphasizes that it does not address whether the exposure to fluoride added to drinking water is associated with a measurable effect on IQ, nor does the monograph assess the benefits of the use of fluoride in oral health or provide a risk/benefit analysis. Causality cannot be determined by retrospective analysis of uncontrolled data.

According to the ADA's expert committee that examined the report in great detail, the monograph does not provide any new or conclusive evidence that should necessitate changes in current community water fluoridation practices for public health policy consideration. None of the studies on IQ included in the organization's review were conducted in the U.S. and were instead from areas with high levels of naturally occurring fluoride in water. A more detailed review of the National Toxicology Program's paper by the ADA and American Association of People with Disabilities has been promised.

Even though fluoride has been studied since 1931, science mandates constant review of new evidence. However, science should be separated from science fiction. Meanwhile, one should rely on credible data supporting the assertion that community fluoride programs are safe, efficacious and cost-effective health care measures.



RESTORING SMILES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

MONROE CARELL JR. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT
VANDERBILT'S CLEFT AND CRANIOFACIAL PROGRAM

EVERY CHILD'S SMILE TELLS A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE.

The Cleft and Craniofacial Program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt is dedicated to ensuring those stories are filled with possibility.



BY PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE, LONG-TERM CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH A WIDE RANGE OF FACIAL DIFFERENCES, THE PROGRAM SUPPORTS PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH SOME OF LIFE'S MOST CHALLENGING JOURNEYS.

With an integrated team of specialists, children receive not only advanced medical treatment but also the compassion and continuity that help them thrive from birth through early adulthood. In a display of community partnership and philanthropy, Delta Dental of Tennessee's charitable arm, the Smile180 Foundation, pledged \$1.075 million to the Cleft and Craniofacial Program. This landmark commitment established the Delta Dental of Tennessee's Smile180 Foundation Directorship, fueling the program's mission to expand its services and provide critical support for young patients and their families across Tennessee and beyond.

A LEGACY OF SUPPORT

Delta Dental's relationship with MCJCH at Vanderbilt is not new. Since 2001, Delta Dental and Smile180 have donated more than \$2.3 million, supporting fundraising events and initiatives that have helped shape the hospital's pediatric care landscape. The latest commitment to the Cleft and Craniofacial Program marks a significant expansion of this longstanding partnership.

ADVANCING PEDIATRIC CARE

The Cleft and Craniofacial Program, led by Dr. Michael Golinko, medical director and chief of Pediatric Plastic Surgery, and Dr. Jim Phillips, co-director of the Cleft Lip and Palate team, provides care for children with a wide range of facial differences. The complexity of these cases means that patients often remain with the program for years, receiving care from an integrated team of specialists.

"Our goal is to expand the scope of the Cleft and Craniofacial Program, establishing it as a premier, internationally recognized program for comprehensive, family-centric cleft and craniofacial care," said Dr. Golinko. "This endowment has

made a tremendous impact in our ability to meet the complex needs of patients with facial differences from birth through early adulthood, advance the field through research and innovation, and moreover, attract and retain outstanding leaders in cleft and craniofacial care."

To date, Delta Dental and Smile180 have invested \$1.2 million in this specific program, allowing MCJCH at Vanderbilt to make major updates in the Advancing Pediatric Care. The program has also been able to recruit a full-time craniofacial orthodontist and dentist amongst the many specialists that care for the kids. Dr. Golinko and other leaders of the program have been intentional in creating a thriving community of families, enacting their Annual Family Fun Day at the Nashville Zoo which has been a linchpin of Delta Dental's support.

A SHARED MISSION

As Dr. Jeffrey Upperman, surgeon-in-chief of the children's hospital, noted, "Support from organizations like Delta Dental plays an important role in our mission to expand and enhance our quality, cutting-edge patient care and enables our teams to advance health care through translational research, all with the goal to meet the complex needs of children and families. We could not do the work we do every day without our community partners."

The program's true impact is seen in the restored confidence of its young patients, the relief of families who find expert guidance, and the community that rallies to transform lives—one smile at a time.



The Magembe family was all smiles at MCJCH at Vanderbilt's Annual Family Fun Day at the Nashville Zoo.



For more information about the Cleft and Craniofacial Program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, visit [ChildrensHospitalVanderbilt.org](https://www.childrenshospitalvanderbilt.org).



These progress pictures of Judah Anderson are just one example of the life-changing work MCJCH at Vanderbilt does every day in the Cleft and Craniofacial Program.

Waiting for a check
in the mail post-claim **can be a hassle!**

**Get paid
faster
with
EFT!**



Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT): A secure and efficient payment solution

Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), or direct deposit, has gained tremendous popularity over the past decade and is now considered a standard method for processing payments across various industries, including health care. As a dentist, you want your claims processed quickly and payments delivered even faster. **EFT ensures your money is in your account with unmatched speed and reduced paperwork and hassle.**

Understanding the safety and efficiency of EFT is crucial. Delta Dental of Tennessee recently announced some security enhancements aimed at making EFT even more secure.

These include:

- **Newly created EFT accounts** will require users to complete a one-time passcode (OTP) procedure.
- **Electronic OTP notifications** are emailed to the address provided when a dentist is credentialed.
- **Paper notifications** will continue to be mailed to the U.S. address provided when the dentist is credentialed.
- **Multifactor authentication (MFA)** procedures recently implemented offer higher security.

Additional security measures focused on password updates are also in the works. These enhancements improve upon the robust security and encryption that was already in place, including Transport Layer Security (TLS), the strongest available encryption standard.

Data at rest is protected with Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) 256-bit encryption, further safeguarding all banking

information. Regular security audits and adherence to SOC 1, SOC 2 and HITRUST compliance standards help identify and address vulnerabilities proactively.

WHY EFT?

EFT payment is fast and efficient, offering several advantages over traditional paper checks and streamlining your practice's financial operations.

Payments are deposited directly into your designated bank account, reducing processing delays. Funds are typically deposited within hours and, depending on your bank's regulations, are available within three to five business days after claim submission. The risk of lost or stolen checks is eliminated with EFT.

Electronic Remittance Advices (ERAs) accompany EFT payments, providing detailed payment information that is accessible online. This minimizes administrative burdens by eliminating the need for manual check handling and bank deposits.

ADDITIONAL SECURITY STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Be on the lookout for EFT change notification letters or emails. These communications are essential

for verifying the legitimacy of changes to your EFT details and preventing fraud.

If you or your company experiences a cybersecurity incident, notify Delta Dental immediately. Doing so enables us to monitor your provider office for potential threats and take proactive measures to protect your data.

STAY SECURE, STAY INFORMED

EFT is not just the fastest way to receive payments—it's also one of the safest when coupled with robust security measures. By adopting secure login practices, watching for notifications, and partnering with Delta Dental for proactive monitoring, you can focus on your practice while we help protect your financial data.



PROVIDER ACHIEVEMENTS

Delta Dental of Tennessee wants to recognize providers who accomplished becoming specialists in 2025.

Dr. Corey Acosta is a lifelong Memphian, following in the footsteps of his father, Dr. John Acosta. He earned his undergraduate degree in Biological Sciences from the University of Southern Mississippi before attending dental school at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. He went on to complete his Pediatric Dentistry residency at UTHSC in Memphis.



If you would like to highlight a provider's achievement in future issues of Best Practice, email BestPractice@DeltaDentalTN.com.

An illustration of a person with dark hair and a white shirt, seen from the chest up, sitting at a computer. The person's hand is on a large green button labeled 'SEND'. Above the person is a green circular graphic with a white envelope icon and a paper airplane icon. The background is a mix of green and white geometric shapes.

**SECURE
MESSAGING
IS COMING TO**

DENTAL OFFICE TOOLKIT

Dental Office Toolkit™ (DOT) can greatly enhance your office's efficiency, and that can mean savings in time, effort and money.

DOT undergoes continual enhancements, upgrades and improvements aimed at making the system as useful and helpful as possible. **In the future, another upgrade will be unveiled: secure messaging.** Be on the lookout for additional status updates in Delta Dental's email communications.

IF YOU'RE NOT USING DOT, HERE'S WHAT YOU'RE MISSING:



ONLINE CLAIMS SUBMISSION

The Dental Office Toolkit offers convenient online claims submission, eliminating the need for manual paperwork. Submitting claims swiftly leads to faster processing times and improved cash flow while reducing administrative burden.



REAL-TIME CLAIM STATUS

Dental offices gain access to real-time claim status updates, enabling them to track the progress of claims effortlessly. Instant feedback on claim status minimizes uncertainty and facilitates better financial planning for practices.



ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION

The Toolkit offers eligibility verification functionalities, allowing dental offices to verify patients' coverage prior to treatment. Verification of eligibility helps prevent claim denials and ensures patients are aware of their coverage, reducing confusion and billing issues.



FAST, POWERFUL TOOLS

An array of tools is available in the Toolkit including a prior authorization system, procedure code search, fast and simple member search, and the ability to get a member's complete dental history across all dental offices.



ELECTRONIC FUNDS TRANSFER (EFT)

The Dental Office Toolkit facilitates electronic funds transfer, allowing dental offices to receive payments directly into their designated bank accounts. This eliminates the need for manual check processing, accelerates payment cycles and improves cash flow management.



PRE-TREATMENT ESTIMATES

Dental providers can request pre-treatment estimates and prior authorizations through the Toolkit. Patients benefit from the transparency regarding treatment costs, enabling informed decision-making and reducing unexpected expenses.



SECURE ATTACHMENTS

When submitting claims, the latest version of DOT allows for attachments to be included. You can upload attachments in the following formats: PNG, JPEG, TIFF, GIF and PDF. Word documents cannot be uploaded, but you can easily convert a Word document to PDF format.



TRAINING RESOURCES

Delta Dental provides comprehensive training resources within the Toolkit, including tutorials, webinars and documentation designed to train staff and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Toolkit's features.



MOBILE ACCESSIBILITY

The Dental Office Toolkit website can be viewed on a mobile device, allowing dental providers to manage administrative tasks on-the-go. This enhances flexibility, efficiency and convenience.

best practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY



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HEAR FROM
YOU!

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