

# best practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2

## 2025 KIDS DENTAL DAY

ONE SMILE.  
A LIFETIME OF IMPACT.



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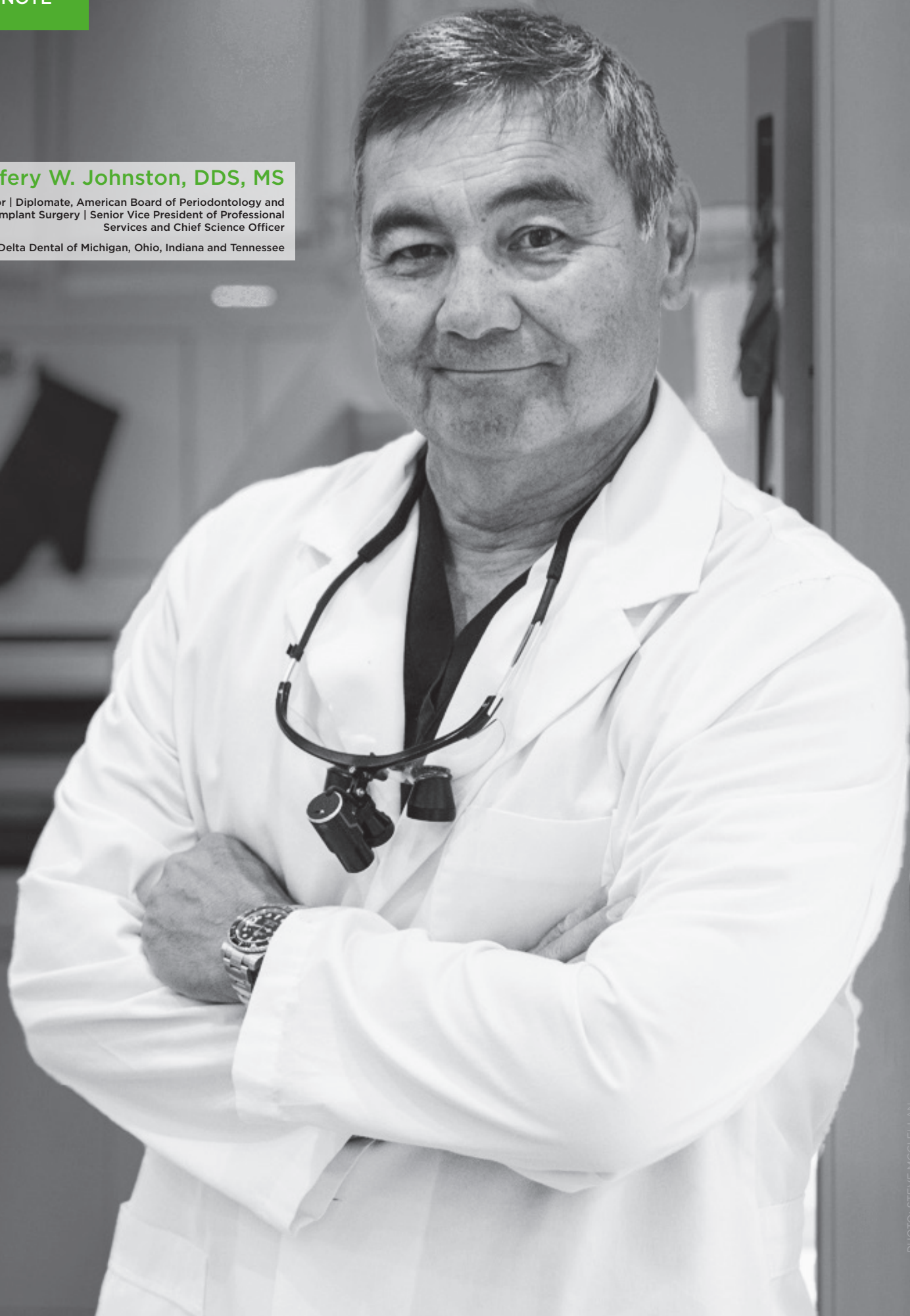
 DELTA DENTAL®



**Jeffery W. Johnston, DDS, MS**

Editor | Diplomate, American Board of Periodontology and  
Dental Implant Surgery | Senior Vice President of Professional  
Services and Chief Science Officer

Delta Dental of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Tennessee



# WITHOUT DENTISTS, THERE IS NO 'DENTAL' IN DELTA DENTAL.

We are proud of our network and grateful that you choose to be part of it. A robust and thriving network of dentists is essential to fulfilling our mission to ensure healthy smiles.

**We know that dealing with insurance—credentialing, filling out claim forms, submitting documentation—can be taxing.**

## So why participate with Delta Dental?

**It's simple—more patients for you.**

Although the issue is complicated, there is overwhelming evidence that dental benefits have had a significantly positive impact on the number of patients in dental chairs and, thus, on oral health in America.

A 2018 systematic review found that dental insurance has a significant effect on increasing dental utilization. Both the Association of Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) and the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute (ADA HPI) say that a patient is twice as likely to visit a dentist if dental benefits are involved. The surgeon general has stated that dental insurance is a strong predictor of children's access to dental care.

## The driver of this? Cost.

A survey by the ADA shows the biggest barrier to a patient receiving care is the price tag (59%). Dental benefits help alleviate that pain point. There is also evidence that those with dental benefits have better oral health because they go to the dentist more frequently.

## How many Americans have dental benefits?

The latest National Association of Dental Plans (NADP) research shows that 88% of the population has dental coverage, including Americans receiving benefits through employer-sponsored or other group plans, individual plans or public benefits. Enrollment in publicly funded benefits increased significantly, up 22.4% in 2022 compared to 2021. However, enrollment in commercial dental benefits was flat compared to 2021.

Being a credentialed provider is the easiest way to take advantage of this trend. You can help patients access the services they need and strengthen your bottom line.

Participating providers are often paid faster and at higher rates than nonparticipating providers. Participating providers can also take advantage of Dental Office Toolkit® (DOT) and electronic funds transfer (EFT) to save on clearinghouse fees and to get claims paid quickly. To help obtain continuing education credits for licensure, participating providers can conveniently access more than 20 hours of CE credit, many of which are mandatory for licensing.

When talking about the benefits of network participation, it's easy (and understandable) to focus solely on the direct impacts to your business. You must keep the lights on just as we do.

But a conversation about network participation that focuses only on financial reimbursements ignores the reason Delta Dental was created by dentists in the first place: to provide affordable dental care to as many people as possible and increase the likelihood that they will visit a dentist for routine checkups and treatments.

Dental benefits increase access to care. That is without dispute. Delta Dental of Tennessee's very mission is to ensure healthy smiles, and we can't achieve this without increasing access to care. You are our partner in that mission and we're proud to have you. **Together, we truly can—and do—change lives one smile at a time.**

Thank you again for helping create the kind of places in which we all want to live and work.

# VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2

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DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

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#### CONTENT

Dr. Jeffery Johnston | Editor

Margaret Trimer | Managing Editor

Tony Hansen | Associate Editor

Shelby Smithson | Associate Editor

#### ART & PHOTO

Jennifer Hough | Art Director

Darcy Wood | Lead Designer

Steve McClellan | Lead Photographer



# GLP-1 agonists & weight loss

Dr. Jeffery Johnston, chief science officer with Delta Dental, explores the science and the buzz behind GLP-1 medications.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE. ►





**THE ORAL MANIFESTATIONS AND COMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DIABETES MELLITUS ARE WELL KNOWN TO INCLUDE XEROSTOMIA, CARIES, PERIODONTAL DISEASES, ORAL CANDIDIASIS, BURNING MOUTH, GLOSSODYNIA, DYSGEUSIA, GLOSSITIS, ORAL LICHEN PLANUS, RECURRENT APHTHOUS STOMATITIS AND DELAYED WOUND HEALING.<sup>1,2</sup>**

Diet and obesity are major risk factors for diabetes. Approximately 70% of American adults are either obese or overweight.<sup>3</sup> Recently, glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonist medications used to control diabetes have been shown to help with weight loss. These medications have become popular for weight control, even in patients without diabetes.<sup>4</sup>

Semaglutide is a GLP-1 receptor agonist approved by the FDA in 2017.<sup>5</sup> There are three FDA-approved semaglutide products. Ozempic (injection) and Rybelsus (tablets) are approved to lower blood

glucose levels in adults with Type 2 diabetes mellitus. Wegovy (injection) is approved for obesity in adults and children aged 12 years and older.<sup>6</sup> Recently, GLP-1 agonists have been shown effective in decreasing body mass index and maintaining weight in children.<sup>7</sup> GLP-1 receptor agonists mimic the GLP-1 hormone released in the gastrointestinal tract after eating. One function of GLP-1 is the stimulation of insulin.

Another function is glucagon reduction, further decreasing blood glucose.<sup>8</sup> GLP-1 in higher amounts suppresses appetite and signals a feeling of fullness.<sup>9</sup> Ozempic is not approved for weight loss. However, semaglutide has been approved for weight loss under the trade name Wegovy.<sup>10</sup> Wegovy has a larger dose of semaglutide than Ozempic. GLP-1 agonists generally result in an average weight loss of 15–20% of total body weight.<sup>11</sup>

Research has shown that discontinuing Ozempic (or Wegovy) results in gaining back the lost weight.<sup>12</sup>



Semaglutide is the first GLP-1 receptor agonist shown to decrease the risk of heart attacks and strokes among those without diabetes.<sup>13</sup> Treatment with drugs like Ozempic requires a lifelong commitment. Side effects, including nausea, reflux, abdominal cramping, delayed gastric emptying and constipation, may contribute to patients discontinuing the medications. More serious but less common side effects include pancreatitis, gastroparesis, bowel obstruction and gallstones/bile duct blockage.<sup>14</sup>

Investigators were quick to point out that the risk varies depending upon the reason why the drugs were being used (diabetes, obesity or weight loss).<sup>15</sup> A rare case of Rhabdomyolysis was reported in the literature in 2023.<sup>16</sup> Recently, an observational study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association suggested semaglutide may be associated with nonarteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy, a type of eye stroke that causes sudden unilateral loss of vision.<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly, semaglutide complications became popular with the legal profession<sup>18</sup> as quickly as the drug became popular for weight loss.

Tirzepatide is another medication of interest. Tirzepatide was approved for treating Type 2 diabetes in 2022 under the name Mounjaro, and in 2023, it was approved for weight loss as Zepbound.<sup>19</sup> Tirzepatide interacts with a second receptor, glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP), to affect insulin and blood glucose levels similarly to GLP-1.<sup>20</sup> Also, GIP delays stomach emptying by decreasing gastric motility.<sup>21</sup> This is like the effect of bariatric surgery; however, Tirzepatide has not been shown to be as efficacious as bariatric surgery.<sup>22</sup> Unlike semaglutide, Tirzepatide has not been shown to reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.<sup>23</sup>

Diabetes mellitus is a risk factor for other chronic diseases such as dementia, sleep apnea and certain obesity-related cancers.<sup>24</sup> A systematic review supported a reduced risk of dementia in patients taking GLP-1 inhibitors for diabetes.<sup>25</sup> In 2024, Eli Lilly released results from two clinical trials comparing Tirzepatide to a placebo over the course of a year. The trials showed that GLP-1 medications can reduce sleep apnea events by up to two-thirds.<sup>26</sup> GLP-1 medications were also associated with lower risks of specific types of obesity-associated cancers (gallbladder, meningioma, pancreatic and hepatocellular carcinomas) compared with insulin or Metformin in patients with Type 2 diabetes.<sup>27</sup> A cohort study by Wang et al showed GLP-1s were associated with a lower risk for colorectal cancer in patients



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

with obesity.<sup>28</sup> These findings provide preliminary evidence of the potential benefit of GLP-1s for certain chronic diseases and cancer prevention in high-risk populations.<sup>29</sup>

The potential health benefits of GLP-1 agonists for people with diabetes seem to outweigh the potential side effects.<sup>30</sup> The same may not be true for weight loss. Obesity is not caused by Ozempic deficiency.<sup>31</sup> The expectation is only 15–20% weight loss, and the results must be maintained with the drug.<sup>32</sup> Although the adverse effects are rare, given the wide use of GLP-1 agonists, the effects must be considered by patients contemplating weight loss. Even though we have seen, expert celebrity endorsement<sup>33</sup> (sarcasm intended), GLP-1 agonists, while useful, should not be considered a panacea for weight control. The high cost of Ozempic, approximately \$1,200 a month, poses a financial barrier for many, potentially limiting access to and continuation of treatment.<sup>34</sup> Currently, there are no approved generic versions. Semaglutide is expected to come off patent in the United States by 2031.<sup>35</sup> However, there are reports of counterfeit Ozempic pens being sold. The FDA has issued warnings.

Obesity is a multifactorial disease due to obesogenic environments, psycho-social factors and genetic variants. The answer may not be as simple as an injection or tablet. We need less judgment and more options. While GLP-1 agonists may be useful adjuncts, behavior modification, counseling, proper diet and exercise continue to be the best advice for long-term health and continued success.

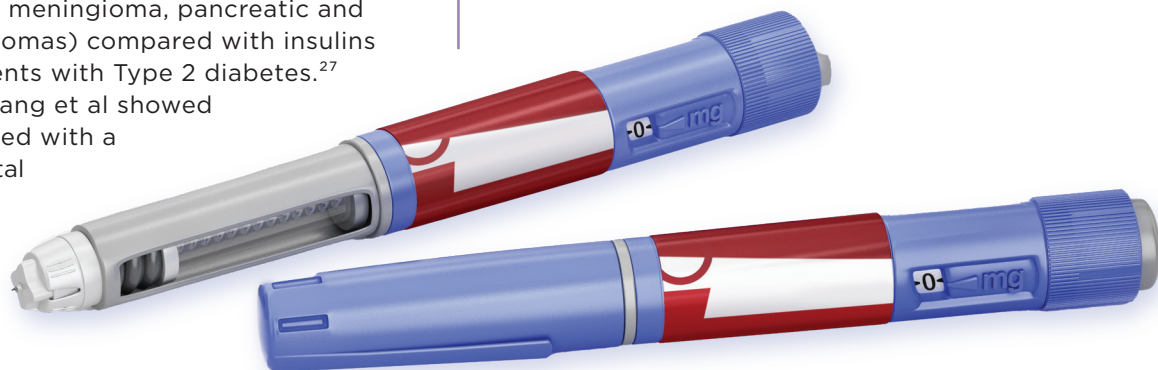


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



# MEET YOUR TENNESSEE STATE DENTAL DIRECTOR

*"SO MANY OF YOU PROVIDE ESSENTIAL DENTAL CARE TO TENNESSEANS WHO MAY OTHERWISE GO WITHOUT CARE, AND THE VITAL ROLE YOU PLAY IS RECOGNIZED AND CELEBRATED."*

I rejoined the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH), Community Health Services in the Oral Health Services program in February 2024 as the State Dental Director. Originally from Clarksville, Tenn., I received my D.D.S. from Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry where I was a member of Omicron Kappa Upsilon National Dental Honor Society, a Clinical Student Mentor, and graduated 4th in my class.

Upon graduation, I worked in private practice for two years. Then I discovered my true passion—public health. I worked with the Tennessee Department of Health for more than 6 years, first as a clinical dentist and then as a Regional Dental Director. I went on to work more than 5 years with TennCare, Tennessee's Medicaid Program, serving in both the Associate Dental Director and Chief Dental Officer roles before returning to TDH.

The mission of TDH is to protect, promote, and improve the health and well-being of all people in Tennessee, with special focus on rural and underserved populations. It's a mindset we keep at the forefront of our dental programs.

Oral Health Services is a clinical dental program in 44 counties across the state, and we have been hard at work to recruit dentists to work in them. In December 2022, 25 of our dental clinics were open, and as of July 2025, we have 34 clinics

open and serving those patients most in need.

We also have a statewide School-Based Dental Prevention Program to meet our youngest Tennesseans where they are. It's a partnership between TDH and TennCare that provides preventive dental services including oral health education, screenings, dental sealants, and more to children in pre-K through 8th grade in Title I and Title I eligible schools. Since the program's inception, we have now provided over 5.8 million dental sealants to over 1 million children.

At the TDH, we oversee the State Oral Health Plan, which is focused on improving access to care, oral health education and advocacy, prevention of oral disease, and oral health resources and workforce—including the Healthy Smiles Initiative. It's a governor's initiative that launched in 2021 with the goal of improving oral health in Tennessee. The major focus areas of the initiative are recruitment of dental students into dental professions, training them to practice in underserved communities, and providing recruiting and retention incentives for service to high need populations in rural areas.

We know access to care starts with having dentists available to do the work. I believe one of the largest and most pervasive pain points for dentists, especially those new to the profession, is the burden of rising

student loan debt. That alone can keep dentists from practicing in rural areas because of the lower earning potential—but you are not alone.

There are several programs that offer student loan repayment or forgiveness. One of those being Tennessee Center for Health Workforce Development's Healthy Smiles Student Loan Repayment Program. It offers repayment options for those working in TDH dental clinics, safety net clinics, rural clinics seeing 20% or more TennCare patients, and urban clinics seeing 40% or more TennCare patients. In exchange, those dentists practice full-time at dental clinics in underserved areas.

Access to affordable dental care remains a challenge for so many, especially those in vulnerable communities across the state. As we know, poor oral health reduces quality of life in many ways, including pain and suffering, reduced ability to chew nutritious foods, difficulty speaking, and missed days from school and work to name a few.

I want to thank you for your ongoing commitment to providing essential dental care to Tennesseans. So many of you provide essential dental care to Tennesseans who may otherwise go without care, and the vital role you play is recognized and celebrated. Thank you for joining us in our mission to protect, promote, and improve the oral health and well-being of all people in Tennessee.



# We want to hear from **YOU!**

- Have an idea for a Best Practice story?
- Interested in contributing a testimonial?
- Want to share your feedback on this issue?

# HELPING HYGIENE

**As dentists, you've seen the numbers on repeat. In fact, you likely didn't need to see the data to know there is a serious problem.**

## YOU LIVE IT EVERY DAY.

**"As a dentist, I am not working at the highest scope of my license. Instead, I am doing other services that a hygienist or dental assistant would do," said Dr. Vinod Miriyala, an Ohio-based dentist with extensive experience in both public and private settings. "This is not an improving situation, and we have to do something more to address it."**

At Delta Dental of Tennessee, we are acutely aware of the challenges dental offices face regarding staffing. The issue is top-of-mind for the dentists in our networks, and it is also top-of-mind for us.

Delta Dental plans across the country have spent a great deal of time, effort and resources on the subject and are rolling out and designing several measures aimed directly at providing tangible relief.

### Evolution of the issue

The pandemic. That's the easy answer to the question of what caused the hygienist shortage. But, there is nuance in the causation.

"I think we now know that the problem was pre-existing, but it reached a breaking point during COVID," said Miriyala, who serves on the board for the Delta Dental Foundation.

"The hygienist workforce predominantly consists of women. When it came to COVID, my experience was that they had to make a decision about taking care of family at home. They put their family first by cutting down hours or leaving the workforce, and rightfully so. Others took on opportunities outside of direct patient care."

DataUSA.io, an online resource that compiles public data from U.S. government sources, shows that in 2022, 94.4% of hygienists in the nation were female.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals that women left the workforce at a rate nearly four times higher than men, with some 865,000 women leaving the workforce in September of 2020.

When looking specifically at dental hygienists, an American Dental Hygienists' Association study published in the February 2021 issue of the Journal of Dental Hygiene found the leading concern (48.3% of the total) that led to a hygienist leaving their position was that they simply didn't want to work as a hygienist until the pandemic was under control. Caring for family was a cited reason for leaving but it was at a much lower clip—10.4%. Concern over workplace safety standards (12.7%) actually drove more hygienists away from the profession than did childcare concerns.



“

The hygienist is the gatekeeper of our practice. They are the face of our clinical care. They see more patients, typically, than we do as dentists. They are the primary caregivers once a patient is stabilized.



**Dr. Vinod Miriyala**  
Pediatric Dentist

Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers indicate the number of people in the workforce has rebounded and is poised to surpass pre-COVID totals. But filling vacant hygiene positions, unfortunately, remains difficult.

"Initially, I thought things would die down after COVID and we would see things go back to normal. But that's not what happened. In fact, many (hygienists) left dentistry entirely," said Miriyala.

The basic economic principle of supply and demand came into play to combat the issue and try to retain current staff or attract new ones. Pay rates for hygienists climbed fast, but it didn't have the impact one might expect. Despite the increase in compensation, the recruitment rate hasn't met or surpassed the attrition rate.

"The hygienist is the gatekeeper of our practice. They are the face of our clinical care. They see more patients, typically, than we do as dentists. They are the primary caregivers once a patient is stabilized," he said.

#### A focus on dental support

Delta Dental of Tennessee has spent a great deal of time, effort and resources on the subject, talking to legislators and participating in a workgroup started by former Tennessee Health Commissioner Dr. Lisa Piercey.

Convened in 2021, the group consisted of oral health stakeholders

from across the state to develop recommendations to increase access to high-quality, affordable dental care for Tennesseans.

A major part of that is having the dental professionals to provide it. The shortage is increasingly problematic in the rural areas of our state.

The average student loan debt for dental support majors in Tennessee varies depending on degree level, but it ranges between \$18,000 and \$25,000. Without assistance in repaying those loans, some graduates are unable to even consider working in underserved areas because of lower income potential.

That was a major focus for Delta Dental of Tennessee and its Smile180 Foundation in helping create the state's Healthy Smiles Initiative. Part of this program provides educational loan repayments for dental professionals who are working in underserved areas, for example in health department dental clinics and safety net clinics. The goal — to get these dental professionals providing care in areas of high need.



Scan this QR code for more information about how to apply for loan repayment.

## DATA DETAILS

The numbers—sobering as they are—are worth repeating for context and perspective.

- In a March 2022 American Dental Association Health Policy Institute poll, 73% of dentists cited staffing issues as the top challenge facing their dental practice. One-third of practice owners said staff shortages make it difficult to run a full schedule.
- In another ADA report, fewer than half of dental hygienists who left employment during the COVID-19 pandemic have returned.
- Another report indicated a decline in dental hygienists of 8% overall.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 9% growth in employment for dental hygienists from 2022 to 2032, further exacerbating the gap between supply and demand.
- Nationwide, there's a projected shortfall of more than 23,000 full-time dental hygienists by 2036.

# New Delta Dental Groups

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](mailto:ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com).

Southern Lawn & Equipment	Antioch	American Fabrication	
Sustaining Commercial Services	Bluff City	Company, LLC	Memphis
Compassus Providence		Kingdom Quality	
Holdings, LLC	Brentwood	Communications, Inc	Memphis
Otter Creek Church	Brentwood	Mid South Jets	Memphis
Change Dermatology	Brentwood	Angel Street Inc	Memphis
Every Nation Churches		Royal International, Inc	
& Ministries	Brentwood	dba Royal Bee Beauty	Memphis
Tulip Hill Healthcare, LLC	Brentwood	TNT Guard Services LLC	Memphis
Four Bridges Dermatology		Tennessee Career Academy	Memphis
& Cosmetics	Chattanooga	Charter Foods, Inc	Morristown
Dynamic Prosthetic		Carlyle Capital	Morristown
& Orthotic LLC dba Prosthetic		Lyttle Fox Therapy	Mt Juliet
& Orthotics Associates of TN	Chattanooga	Freedom Functional	
Kimmy's Christian		Wellness, LLC	Mt Juliet
Academy, LLC	Clarksville	Munford Tire and Brake	Munford
PMA Child Care Center	Clarksville	Kio Management Group LLC	Murfreesboro
Austin's Beauty College, LLC	Clarksville	Tasoma Inc	Murfreesboro
Cleveland Chiropractic		Lipman Brothers, LLC	Nashville
& Rehabilitation	Cleveland	Mid State Mobile Concrete Inc	Nashville
Network Data Source, LLC	Collierville	Kraft and Company PLLC	Nashville
Ransom Entertainment LLC		Mighty Hearts Home Care Inc	Nashville
dba Tenn Pin Alley	Columbia	T.W. Frierson Contractor, Inc	Nashville
Rubicon Transportation LLC	Cookeville	Isenhour Door Products, Inc	Nashville
RiverTown Realty LLC	Cordova	18th Ave Enrichment Center	Nashville
906 Studio, PLLC	Franklin	Design Lab, Inc	Nashville
Pink Mullet Salon South LLC	Franklin	Milestone Home Healthcare	
Pink Mullet Salon	Franklin	Services	Nashville
Pink Mullet Salon Carothers	Franklin	National Career Academy	
Harpeth Park Engineering	Franklin	Coalition, Inc	Nashville
AssureSource, LLC	Franklin	Signs Now Nashville	Nashville
BHS Solutions LLC	Franklin	The Covenant School	Nashville
Chrysalis Modern Italian	Franklin	Legacy Commercial Real	
Heritage Barber Shop	Franklin	Estate Law, PLLC	Nashville
Crutcher's Auto Repair	Franklin	Blakley Construction	
Able Helpers HomeCare	Goodlettsville	Services, LLC	Nashville
B. Home Co.	Gordonsville	Divine Supports Inc	Nashville
Do It Right Remodel	Gray	Volunteer Schools	Nashville
Central Baptist Church	Greeneville	The Car Care Center West	Nashville
Renfro Farms	Huntingdon	BenieScan, Inc dba VB Scout	Nashville
Regional Health Resources	Kingsport	Fannie Battle Day Home	
Swift Industrial Power, Inc	Knoxville	for Children, Inc	Nashville
Morgan Contracting, Inc	Knoxville	Industry Plant	
Ameris Health Solutions LLC	Knoxville	Entertainment LLC	Nashville
Rocky Mountain Franchising Inc		Capitol City Bolt	
dba Jani-King of Knoxville	Knoxville	& Screw Co. Inc	Nashville
The Restoration House		North America Insurance Group	Oak Ridge
of East Tennessee	Knoxville	Premier Contracting and	
Olive Tree Early Learning		Technical Service, Inc	Oak Ridge
Academy	Knoxville	GUB, Inc	Old Hickory
KPS Wholesale, LLC	Knoxville	Turnkey Technical	
Knox Apothecary LLC	Knoxville	Services, LLC	Oliver Springs
Industrial Electronics, Inc	Knoxville	Houston Tank Services, LLC	Paris
Smiths Tubular Systems -		Bruce Building Group, LLC	Pigeon Forge
Laconia, Inc (STS Aerospace)	Laconia	Curtis Electric, Inc	Ripley
Macon Bank & Trust	Lafayette	Harrison Chilhowee dba	
Novamet Specialty Products		The King's Academy	Seymour
Corporation	Lebanon	Duck River Electric	
Simply Elite In Home Care LLC	Lebanon	Membership Corporation	Shelbyville
Long Electric, LLC	Lenoir City	Crimson Security	Smyrna
D&K Management, Inc	Lenoir City	Patriot Safeguard Services LLC	Smyrna
Dutch Tech, Inc	Lobelville	Black Box Ice Cream LLC	Smyrna
Recovery Community Inc	Madison	James Developmental Center, Inc	Waverly
Logical Systems, Inc	Memphis	Senior Living LLC dba Magnolia	
		Place Assisted Living	Waverly



# 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](mailto:ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com).

Scott Jackson	Adamsville	Andrea Sivavajchaipong	Knoxville
Tapuwa Chikowore	Alcoa	Benjamin Stroud	Knoxville
Angel Jones	Alcoa	Michael Williams	Knoxville
Indi Shelton	Antioch	Alexander Hagar	Knoxville
Michonne West	Antioch	Melissa Kemink	Knoxville
Joseph Majekodunmi	Bartlett	Jacob Perry	Knoxville
Edwin Alter	Brentwood	Alexander Pilgreen	Knoxville
Jacqueline Coleman-Fatt	Brentwood	William Pippin	Knoxville
Carl Friddle	Brentwood	Dimitrios Vareldzis	Knoxville
Jessica Hagan	Brentwood	David Childers	La Follette
Ryan Martin	Brentwood	Jodi Hill	Lebanon
Purvi Patel	Brentwood	Caroline Slocum	Lebanon
Stephen Peterman	Brentwood	Matthew Song	Lebanon
Alec Temlock	Brentwood	Jessica Tucker	Lenoir City
Caleb Widner	Bristol	James McGee	Martin
David Reisinger	Chattanooga	Brian Patterson	Medina
James Ohlsson	Chattanooga	Roy Hudson	Memphis
James Pritchard	Chattanooga	Justice Johnson	Memphis
Connie Wise	Chattanooga	Sarah Kutas	Memphis
Antonio Roberst	Clarksville	Lisa Phillips	Memphis
Philip Worthen	Clarksville	Madeline Huddleston	Memphis
Zachary Youngblood	Cleveland	Grayson Ross	Memphis
Ahmed Abumustafa	Cookeville	Erin Anderson	Murfreesboro
Jonathan Hernandez	Cordova	Ali Assaad	Murfreesboro
Cameron Jones	Crossville	Austin Barker	Murfreesboro
Alexandria Dixon	Dyersburg	Nicholas Girsky	Murfreesboro
Callie McIntire	Dyersburg	Mina Goirgy	Murfreesboro
Scott Coryell	Farragut	Devin Patel	Murfreesboro
Eunice Gomez-Mora	Franklin	Alaina Skidmore	Murfreesboro
Jason Hutto	Franklin	Elizabeth Williams	Murfreesboro
Nicole Nguyen	Franklin	Tyson Steere	Murfreesboro
Hiren Patel	Franklin	Mathew Beard	Nashville
Kaylie Jerrolds	Germantown	Mellanie Kim	Nashville
Emily Suffridge	Germantown	Antonia Kolokythas	Nashville
Denise Terese-Koch	Goodlettsville	Nick Prater	Nashville
Binal Patel	Greeneville	Austin Reitnauer	Nashville
Keith Usry	Hampton	Camille Stone	Nashville
Ashley Krape	Hendersonville	Marina Tawfik	Nashville
Cassidy McNeely	Hendersonville	Kevin Corvacho	Nashville
Madison Papich	Hendersonville	Monica Davidson	Nashville
Lauren Hardy	Hermitage	Cassidy Mangini	Nolensville
Sarah Pasch	Hermitage	Ryan Smith	Nolensville
Kirk Haugen	Hixson	James Ray	Powell
Austin Toler	Hixson	Parker Brown	Pulaski
Sydney Wingfield	Hixson	Chad Webb	Sevierville
William Callahan	Jackson	Alexander Boulay	Smyrna
Rachel Chaney	Jefferson City	Bayley Graves	Smyrna
Aaron Lazuka	Johnson City	William Keeton	Smyrna
Jordan Broadwater	Kingsport	Nidhi Patel	Smyrna
Benjamin Perrault	Kingsport	Sarah Shearer	Sparta
Joe Griffin	Knoxville	Faiza Mahfooz	Spring Hill
Ramya Hedge	Knoxville	Mandouh Yasin	Spring Hill
Austin Holmgren	Knoxville	Michael Strait	Spring Hill
Benjamin Johnson	Knoxville	Scotty Devine	Sweetwater
Joshua Kimrey	Knoxville	Jessica Minton	Tazewell
Zack Martin	Knoxville	Rexford Hurley	White Pine
Allyson Murchison	Knoxville		

# Serving up SMILES



PHOTOS: CITYCURRENT / TAUSHA DICKINSON

**More than 250 kids** received free dental screenings and cleanings at our fourth annual Kids Dental Day.



About **25% of children** receiving cleanings also had signs of developing cavities.



Hundreds of children from across Middle Tennessee recently received free dental screenings, new shoes, hygiene kits, books, and more during the 4th annual Kids Dental Day at First Horizon Park. Hosted by Delta Dental of Tennessee, the Nashville Sounds, and cityCURRENT, the event brought together 250 children and over a dozen community organizations to provide essential health services and school readiness resources to area kids who need it most.

"This is one of our favorite days of the year," said Adam English, General Manager and Chief Operating Officer of the Nashville Sounds. "First Horizon Park is meant to be a place where families

can come together, and thanks to our incredible partners, we're able to make a real impact for hundreds of kids in our community."

Tooth decay is the most common chronic condition of childhood, and poor oral health can affect a child's quality of life, performance at school, and success later in life. Left untreated, these cavities can lead to pain, infections, and missed school days - and affect a child's ability to eat, speak, play, and learn. Events like Kids Dental Day help bridge the gap in access to care and put children on a path toward healthier, more confident futures.

“

It's a fun, high-impact day that helps make care more accessible - and reminds kids that their health and happiness matter.

Jeff Ballard,  
President and CEO  
Delta Dental of Tennessee

"We're always grateful to the Sounds and our many community partners and volunteers who come together to make Kids Dental Day such a success," said Jeff Ballard, President and CEO of Delta Dental of Tennessee. "It's a fun, high-impact day that helps make care more accessible - and reminds kids that their health and happiness matter."



“

Helping kids access  
quality dental care  
is at the heart of  
our mission.

Dr. Michele Blackledge-Polk  
Neighborhood Health

The 250 participating kids arrived throughout the day from summer camps and community programs that coordinated with event organizers, including Preston Taylor Ministries and local chapters of the Boys and Girls Club of Middle Tennessee. Kids received free dental screenings and dental cleanings (as needed), a new pair of socks and shoes, snacks, and a new book. About 25% of children receiving cleanings also had

signs  
of  
developing  
cavities

that the dental team was able to treat with silver diamine fluoride (SDF), a non-invasive treatment used to stop the growth of tooth decay.

“Helping kids access quality dental care is at the heart of our mission,” said Dr. Michele Blackledge-Polk, Director of Oral Health at Neighborhood Health. “Good oral health habits start early and set the foundation for lifelong health, confidence, and success. One of the most powerful aspects of events like Kids Dental Day is our ability to assess the state of children in the community by having limited exams and education on brushing and flossing. Silver Diamine Fluoride is a new tool that works by preventing the progression of cavities. When properly used, we can reduce

the need for drilling and hopefully the number of visits required to treat the tooth. This event is all about meeting families where they are and making oral health approachable and fun.”

The day also featured educational stations and activities to engage children as they prepare to return to school in the coming weeks. Book'em brought their Book Bus, giving every child the opportunity to pick out a free book to take home. The American Heart Association provided hands-only CPR demonstrations, and the Adventure Science Center hosted STEM activities. PBS Kids on Nashville PBS gave out temporary tattoos featuring characters from the Smile180 Foundation-supported oral health education programming.

“For many of our families, back-to-school can be extremely time-consuming and stressful,” said Dwight Johnson, Executive Director at Preston Taylor Ministries.

# See the impact

## when **companies work together.**

“Kids Dental Day helps to alleviate a lot of that burden with care, joy, and community. Our students left with healthier smiles, fresh shoes, and a boost of confidence for the year ahead.”

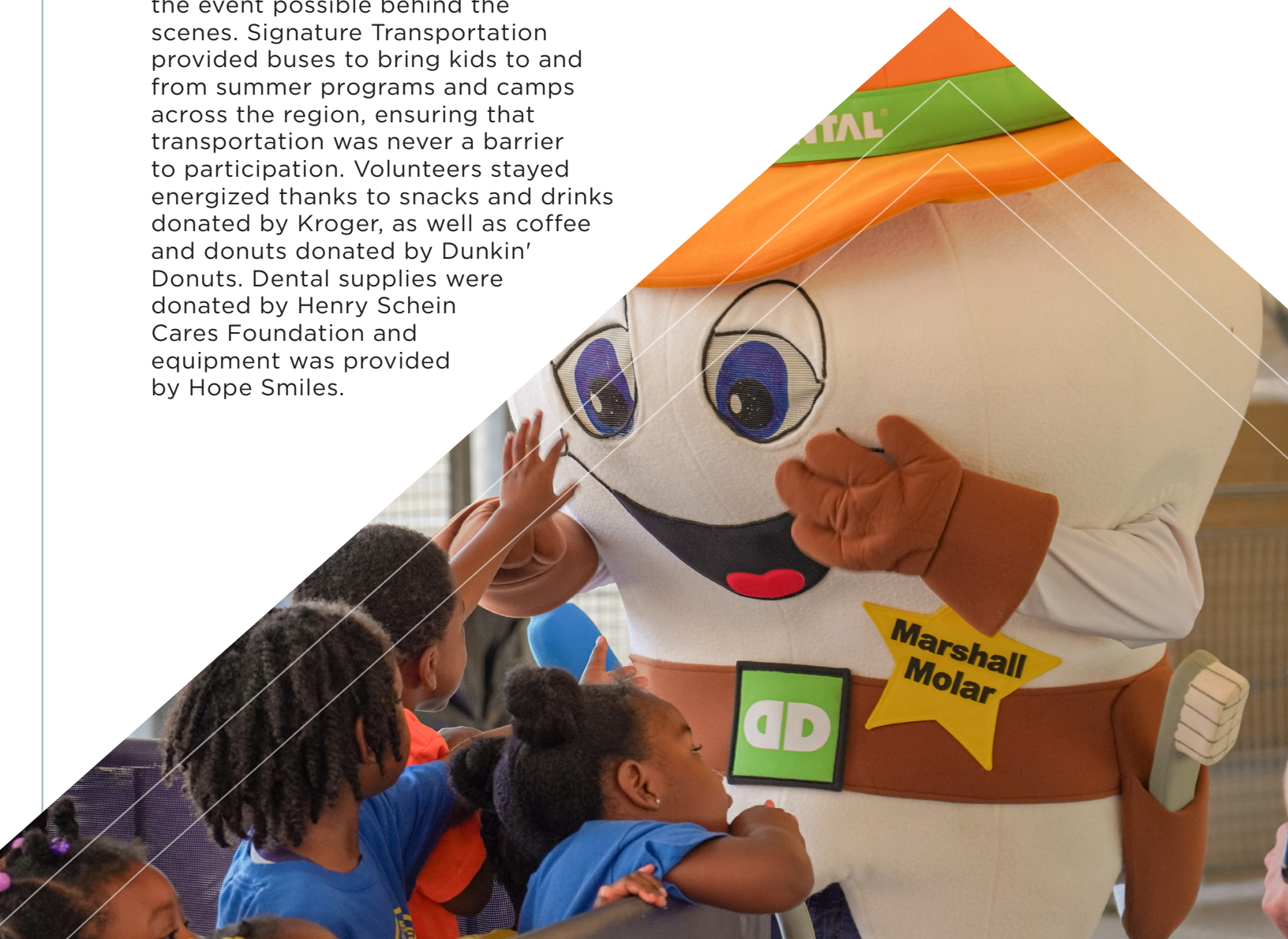
130 volunteers from cityCURRENT and other community groups helped make the day run smoothly - from assisting families and guiding kids through activities to distributing books, snacks, and dental kits.

Additional partners helped to make the event possible behind the scenes. Signature Transportation provided buses to bring kids to and from summer programs and camps across the region, ensuring that transportation was never a barrier to participation. Volunteers stayed energized thanks to snacks and drinks donated by Kroger, as well as coffee and donuts donated by Dunkin' Donuts. Dental supplies were donated by Henry Schein Cares Foundation and equipment was provided by Hope Smiles.

“Kids Dental Day is a shining example of what can happen when the business community comes together with a shared purpose,” said Kelly Meyers, Nashville Market President, cityCURRENT. “It’s more than a day of service - it’s a reminder to each child that they matter, and we’re here to support them.”



Scan the QR code or visit [DeltaDentalTN.com/KidsDentalDay](https://DeltaDentalTN.com/KidsDentalDay) to learn more.



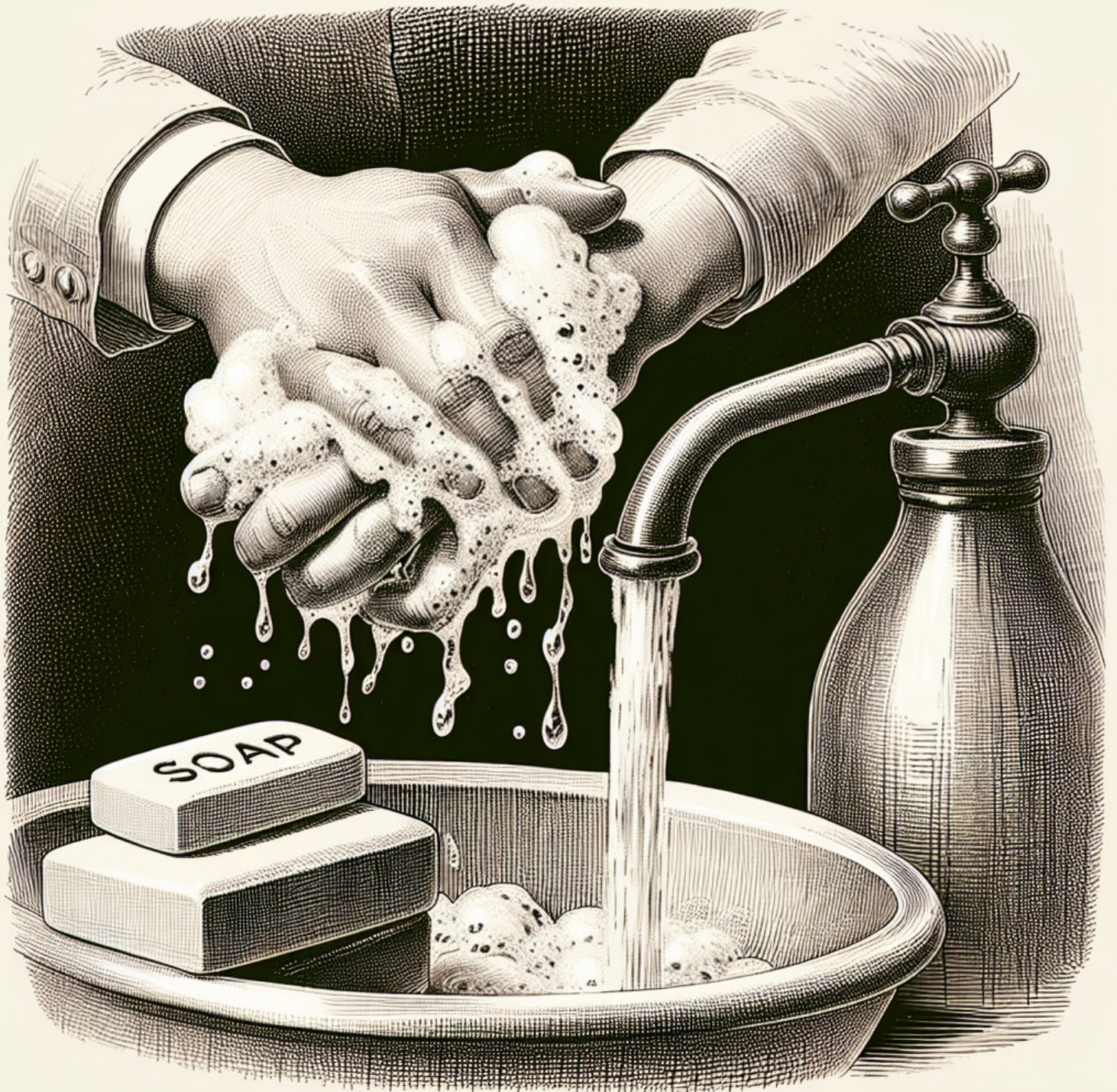


EVER WONDER HOW THIS COMMON PRACTICE GOT ITS START?

# HAND-WASHING

## *HERESY*

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





# In 19th-century Europe, puerperal fever, also known as childbed fever, was a significant public health problem with high maternal mortality.

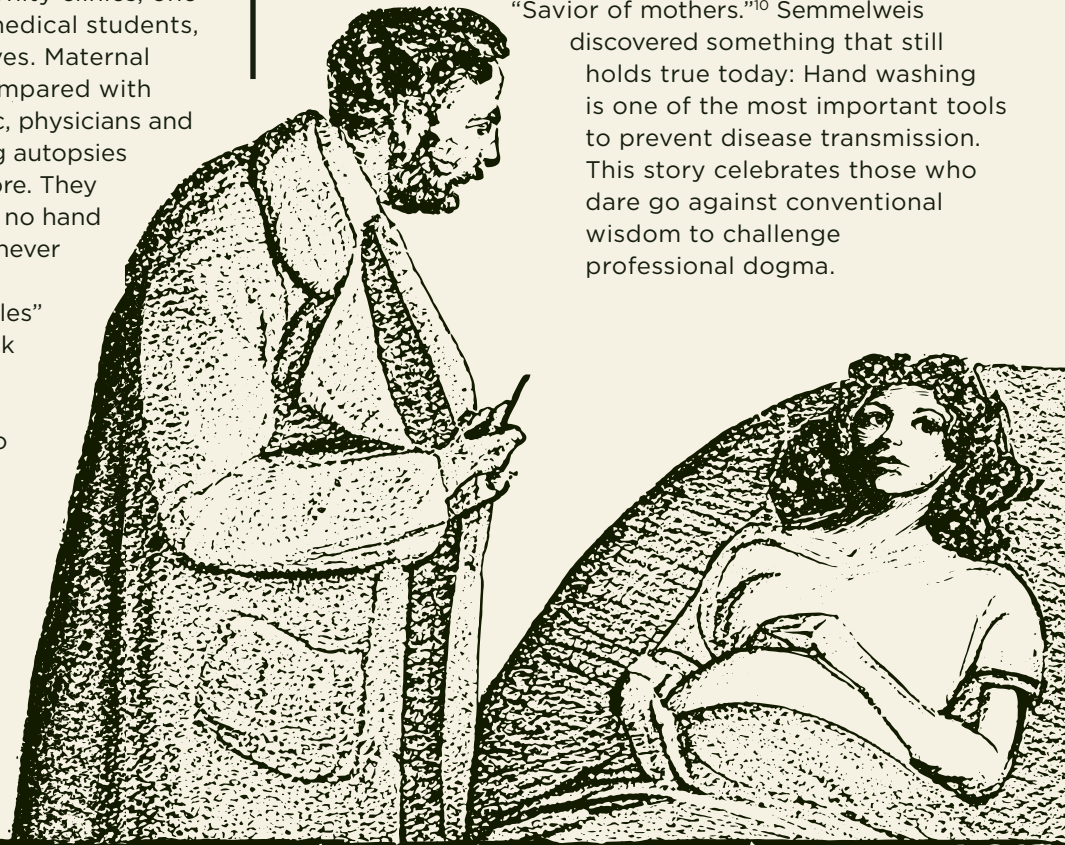
Signs and symptoms include a fever greater than 38.0°C (100.4°F), chills and lower abdominal pain.<sup>1</sup> Onset occurs from one to 10 days post-parturition. The first recorded epidemic of puerperal fever occurred at the Hôtel-Dieu de Paris in 1646. Hospitals reported death rates between 20% and 25%, with intermittent fatalities of 100%.<sup>2</sup> It was thought to be caused by miasma, epidemicity or the Will of Providence.<sup>3</sup> Apart from bloodletting, there was no cure.

Hungarian obstetrician Ignaz Semmelweis (1818–1865), working in Vienna General Hospital, treated these women and, upon their deaths, performed autopsies in an attempt to elucidate an etiology and eventually a treatment. He studied the two maternity clinics, one with all deliveries by physicians and medical students, the other with all deliveries by midwives. Maternal mortality in the first clinic was 16% compared with 7% in the second clinic. In the first clinic, physicians and medical students began their day doing autopsies on women who had died the night before. They then proceeded to the labor room with no hand hygiene. Midwives of the second clinic never conducted autopsies. Semmelweis hypothesized that certain “death particles” from body tissues of the deceased stuck to the hands of physicians and medical students during autopsies and their unclean hands carried these particles to the women in labor. Presumably, these particles caused the puerperal fever. Keep in mind that the microscope and cell theory by Schleiden and Schwann (1839) had yet to be accepted. Surgical gloves were not invented until 1889.<sup>4</sup> Thinking that hand-washing might reduce transmission of these death particles, Semmelweis advocated a hand-washing policy of brushing the hands and nails with a calcium

hypochlorite solution before entering the labor room. He chose hypochlorite because, at the time, it was the best way to remove the smell left behind by the residual pieces of a corpse. This resulted in a 90% decrease in mortality.<sup>5</sup>

Publication of his findings and his book “The Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever”<sup>6</sup> in 1861 was met with great contempt by the medical profession. Semmelweis’ theories conflicted both with conventional medical concepts and with the image of doctors, as it insinuated physicians were the ones giving childbed fever to women.<sup>7</sup> Semmelweis was forced to move from Vienna to Budapest to end his career at a city hospital. Suffering from depression and paranoia, he was eventually institutionalized, where he died in 1865.

Semmelweis’ contribution was recognized 20 years after his death as the medical profession became more receptive after the germ theory of disease by Louis Pasteur<sup>8</sup> and the concept of antisepsis by Joseph Lister<sup>9</sup> were accepted. He was hailed as the “Father of hand hygiene,” the “Father of infection control,” and the “Savior of mothers.”<sup>10</sup> Semmelweis discovered something that still holds true today: Hand washing is one of the most important tools to prevent disease transmission. This story celebrates those who dare go against conventional wisdom to challenge professional dogma.



1 Williams Obstetrics (24th ed.). McGraw-Hill Professional. 2014. pp. Chapter 37. 2 Loudon I. “Deaths in childbed from the eighteenth century to 1935”. Med History 1986; 30: 1–41. 3 <https://www.gotquestions.org/divine-providence.html>. 4 Robert Lathan (2010). “Caroline Hampton Halsted: the first to use rubber gloves in the operating room.” Proc (Bayl Univ Med Cent). 23 (4): 389–92. 5 Caplan, Caralee E. (1995). “The Childbed Fever Mystery and the Meaning of Medical Journalism.” McGill Journal of Medicine. 6 <http://www.med.mcgill.ca/epidemiology/hanley/c609/material/Semmelweis1860.pdf>. 7 Wyklicky H, Skopec M (1983). “Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, the prophet of bacteriology”. Infect Control. 4 (5): 367–370. 8 Smith KA. Louis Pasteur, the father of immunology Front Immunol. 2012 Apr 10;3:68. 9 Worboys M. Joseph Lister and the performance of antiseptic surgery. Notes Rec R Soc Lond. 2013 Sep 20;67(3):199–209. 10 Tyagi U, Barwal KC. Ignaz Semmelweis-Father of Hand Hygiene. Indian J Surg. 2020 Jun;82(3):276–277.



# THE WAITING GAME:

How **appointment timing** can impact oral health and your bottom line

One key contributor to improved oral health is one that's easy to overlook—the importance of appointment availability.

In today's ever-busy world, finding the time to visit the dentist isn't easy. And, as dentists, finding the time to meet the demands of your patients while juggling staff and office time is just as challenging. Is it worth the effort? **Absolutely.**

Appointment availability makes it easier for patients to find a date that works with their schedule, and that can lead to more frequent visits, reduced cancellations and improved oral health maintenance.

The early detection of dental issues through regular exams can help patients to avoid more invasive (and costly) procedures. The ability to set timely appointments enable dentists to catch these issues before they progress.

One of the biggest factors that keep people from seeing a dentist is anxiety over the visit. The Journal of Dental Hygiene reported between 9% and 15% of anxious patients avoid dental care completely, but as many as one-third of those surveyed said they would avoid dental care to some degree due to anxiety. Preventive care can reduce the need for longer, more invasive procedures that could increase anxiety in some patients.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that more than 40% of adults aged 30 and older have some form of gum disease. Early intervention reduces the risk of complications and supports long-term health, reinforcing the importance of timely appointments.

## NEED SOME IDEAS TO HELP?

We understand staffing issues can make scheduling more difficult, particularly when dealing with a lack of hygienists.

See page 10 to learn how Delta Dental is working to address this issue.

## Consider these tips:

- Allow time for emergency visits to promptly see patients in pain.
- Consider the use of teledentistry for emergency triage.
- Provide training and education for staff for improved customer service.
- Utilize specialized software to help manage office operations.





# PROTECTING DATA WITH MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

Enhanced security for all Delta Dental online accounts, coming soon.

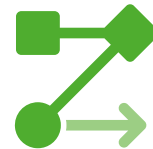
To help protect your practice and patient data, all Delta Dental online accounts will use multi-factor authentication later this year. While some Delta Dental online accounts already need multi-factor authentication, this added layer of security will soon be required for all. Stay tuned for more updates.

## WHAT IS MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION?



### Multi-step login process

Multi-factor authentication is a multi-step account login process that uses additional verification steps like email codes, security questions or fingerprints.



### Added layer of security for your sensitive data

This added layer of security makes it more difficult for hackers to access accounts with stolen passwords alone, protecting sensitive patient information and helping prevent costly cyber attacks on your practice.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE TRANSITION?



### Start preparing now

Get ready for this transition by ensuring all users have unique logins that are not shared across the practice.



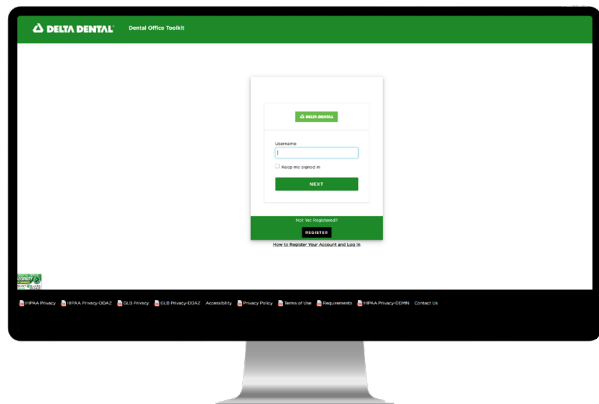
### The importance of unique logins

Once multi-factor authentication takes effect, unique logins will ensure increased security, proper user identification, monitoring and accountability within your practice.

Stay tuned for more updates and timing on this transition.

## ■ PAYMENT MADE SIMPLE: ENROLL IN ELECTRONIC FUNDS TRANSFER

Get your claim payments faster by enrolling in Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Delta Dental of Tennessee will send claim payments electronically to your designated bank or financial institution; payments will typically be in your account within 48 hours!



- ✓ Log in to your **Dental Office Toolkit**
- ✓ **Select Direct Deposit** from the navigation menu
- ✓ The Direct Deposit Accounts screen will appear where you can **select Add New Office**
- ✓ **Fill in your information** on the Direct Deposit Registration screen and select Continue
- ✓ Verify your information and **accept the Terms for Direct Deposit Registration** to confirm
- ✓ Your direct deposit account will be active **within 7 days**

## ■ DELTA DENTAL MYTH BUSTED: NO-SHOW FEES

Delta Dental of Tennessee does not dictate how network dentists handle commercial patient no-show (or late cancellations) situations in your office.

***Note:** Medicaid programs set their own no-show policies and, in most instances, do not allow you to bill no-shows/late cancels.*

**YOU ARE FREE TO CHARGE PATIENTS DIRECTLY IF YOU SO CHOOSE.**

## ■ IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: NEW CE COURSES AVAILABLE

If you're looking for continuing education credits, here's a reminder that Delta Dental of Tennessee has you covered. Our free CE courses are available online, and we've added three new offerings.

Check out the summaries by visiting our CE course webpage:



[DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists](https://DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists)



# IMPORTANT:

## DELTA DENTAL OF KENTUCKY HAS A NEW PORTAL

Even though your practice is located in Tennessee, you may have Delta Dental of Kentucky members if they are employees (or a dependent) of a business headquartered in Kentucky.

Please note that Delta Dental of Kentucky has updated to a new dental portal to verify insurance coverage of Delta Dental of Kentucky patients.

Please use the Dental HUB for all Delta Dental of Kentucky patient information.

Follow the steps below to verify benefits for patients with coverage from Delta Dental of Kentucky.

- 1 Go to [deltadentalky.com](https://deltadentalky.com).
- 2 Click "Sign in/Register" in the upper right-hand corner and select the option for employers, dentists and producers.
- 3 Select the option for "Dental HUB."
- 4 Click on "Sign in With Delta Dental" and log in through your Delta Dental account.

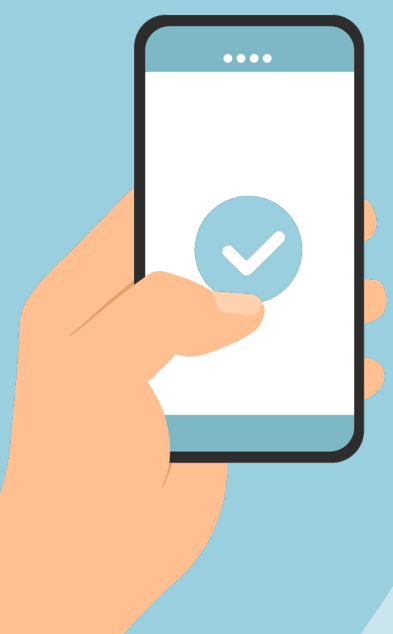
After signing in, add Delta Dental of Kentucky as a Payer Partner in Billing Set-Up on the HUB utilizing a prior Delta Dental of Kentucky claim. For further assistance, please email [providerrelations@deltadentalky.com](mailto:providerrelations@deltadentalky.com).



# INFORMATION REQUESTS

## MEET

# DENTAL OFFICE TOOLKIT



Delta Dental is moving toward a more efficient and eco-friendly process by sending information requests electronically to providers registered with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT). The goal is to enhance the timeliness of returning missing information on claims.

For providers new to DOT, when you sign up for DOT, you will be automatically opted into electronic delivery for Information Requests (IRs). However, you still have the option to opt-out and receive paper IRs if you prefer.

For existing DOT providers, you will receive a notification about this change via DOT messaging with an option to continue receiving paper IRs if that is your choice.

**We plan to implement this change by October 1, 2025.**



best  
practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

**Thank you**  
for your continued efforts  
to improve oral health,  
**one smile at a time.**

