

new dentist **news**



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‘PRETTY COMMON PHENOMENON WHERE HIGH-ACHIEVING PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THEY ARE SOMEHOW NOT GOOD ENOUGH’

BY DAVID BURGER

New dentists and dental students aren't the only ones who suffer from what is known as "imposter syndrome."

But they could be more susceptible to those feelings than older, more experienced dentists as they face new situations and possibly doubt their abilities, especially when they are placed in a new setting or performing a new procedure.

Muhalab Al Sammarraie, D.D.S., a San Diego-based new dentist, said that in one of his first jobs after graduating from dental school, he felt lost and hesitant.

"Others who worked with me in those organizations sometimes directly told me, 'What are you doing here?' and 'You don't belong to this career at all, and it's not for

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NDC chair reflects ON FIRST YEAR AS FULL MEMBER OF ADA BOARD OF TRUSTEES

BY STACIE CROZIER

As the first ADA New Dentist Committee chair with full membership and voting privileges on the ADA Board of Trustees, Seth A. Walbridge, D.M.D., says his year of service “has been very busy.”

“It’s quite an honor to be the first NDC chair in this position, and the increase in responsibility has been intense,” said Dr. Walbridge. “To have both roles at the same time can be daunting to put it mildly. But the New Dentist Committee now has a more streamlined process for delegating tasks to make life easier for the next incoming chair of the NDC.”

Dr. Walbridge says NDC Vice-Chair James Lee, D.M.D., “has helped me tremendously. I cannot say enough about him as a person and all he has done in helping me with this role.” Dr. Lee is the NDC representative for the 1st District.

As a part-time associate dentist in a private practice in Easton, Pennsylvania, and a professor and administrator for a dental hygiene program in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Dr. Walbridge’s career obligations plus his volunteer roles in organized dentistry have kept him on his toes. He and his wife Kelly, an anesthesiologist/critical care physician, have a son, Eli, who will turn 2 in October, and rescue dog Lulu is also part of the family.

New Dentist Committee chairs have participated as guests at ADA Board meetings since 2015.

Following the passage of Resolution 53H-2021, the NDC chair now has full voting privileges at board meetings and access to all board materials and sessions, including executive and closed sessions, and participates in orientation and the board retreat.



Dr. Walbridge

“The transition to full voting member of the board has been surprisingly smooth, and it’s a testament to the Board of Trustees

accepting me with open arms into the role,” he said. “I have been lucky to have this group as mentors and friends, and I think my presence on the board has increased awareness of employee dentist and student dentist needs. Members of the board have told me personally how refreshing the new dentist perspective has been this year, and it has been great to provide feedback regarding the needs of the new dentist. It’s crucial that this segment of our membership is represented at all levels, especially at such a high level in the organization.” ■

**It’s quite an honor
to be the first NDC
chair in this position.**

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What is ‘imposter syndrome,’ AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

(continued from cover)



Dr. Al Sammarraie



Dr. Mellion



Dr. Raja

you.’ At that time, I questioned myself and doubted my skills.”

Alex Mellion, D.M.D., an Ohio-based orthodontist, said that early on he felt anxiety in his profession despite years of training in dental school.

“I remember many times in my career, and especially in my early career, I was faced with a new situation and doubted that I was able to provide adequate care or live up to my own personal expectations,” said Dr. Mellion.

Dr. Mellion faced similar feelings of self-doubt as he ascended the leadership ladder of organized dentistry.

“I have been fortunate to serve on ADA committees as a dental student and again as a new dentist,” he said. “I

find that any time I enter any new group, there is always an acclimation period. Two years ago, I began serving on the ADA Council on Ethics, Bylaws and Judicial Affairs as the New Dentist Committee member to the council. Being a new or young dentist in this situation can be intimidating.”

They are not alone, said Sheela Raja, Ph.D., associate professor and clinical psychologist at the University of Illinois Chicago colleges of medicine and dentistry.

Imposter feelings are normal, she said.

“Imposter syndrome isn’t really a disorder,” she said. “It’s really a pretty common phenomenon where high-achieving people feel like they are somehow not good enough, or that somehow they are a fraud — that everyone else really knows more than they do. Sometimes, if you come from a historically marginalized group, you may be more likely to experience this, because you have fewer peers to talk to and get support from. You also have fewer role models, and that adds to a sense that you don’t belong.”

Dr. Raja added that there is so much going on in the lives of dental students and new dentists that it’s easy for them to look around and think that everyone else — except them — has it figured out.

“High achievers hold themselves to high standards,” she said. “And that makes it even more likely that you are looking at everyone else’s ‘best performance,’ or

‘best day,’ and thinking that you need to perform at that level of excellence all the time.”

Dr. Raja said there are ways to stave off feelings of imposter syndrome.

“Keep an eye on your thinking,” she said. “For example, do you think something needs to be ‘perfect’ in order to celebrate? Celebrate completing something, even if it isn’t perfect. Get support, particularly from mentors and people you trust. Save any small thing that gives you encouragement, like a thank you card from a patient, or an email from your friend that is cheering you on. On days you feel unsure about yourself, look at those for inspiration. Try to dig deeper into your feelings. Imposter feelings are really tied up with perfectionism. Try to identify

Celebrate completing something, even if it isn't perfect. Get support, particularly from mentors and people you trust.

great things about you that have nothing to do with your professional identity — e.g., you know how to throw a great dinner party, you have a lot of fun on the golf course, or you are great at crafting with your kids.”

She added, “Mentors help so much. And we can only do that if we continue to value diversity, equity, and

inclusion. The more kinds of people we have in the field, the more people can look around and say, ‘Hey, I do belong here. Other people who look like me/from my background are here.’ In fact, a little bit of uncertainty when you are first starting out professionally is healthy. It keeps you curious and learning.”

Dr. Mellion was apprehensive about joining a group of more seasoned dentists on the Council on Ethics, Bylaws and Judicial Affairs, many with more than 30 years of experience on state and local committees pertaining to ethics and bylaws. But after a few meetings, with the support of other council members, he felt more comfortable.

“Now I am proud of the input and accomplishments that I have made to CEBJA and the New Dentist Committee,” he said. “Getting over the initial anxiety can provide for a meaningful impact and get past many of those ‘imposter’ feelings.”

For Dr. Al Sammarraie, he learned that it was OK to, as he said, “be me.”

“Learning and working on my emotional intelligence made me understand that I should not doubt myself,” he said. ■

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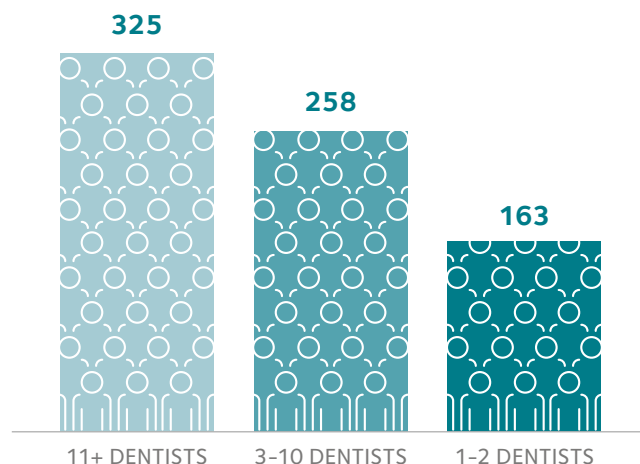
Medicaid participation INCREASES WITH PRACTICE SIZE

A recent study of U.S. dentists who participate in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program found that participation has some correlation with practice size and location as well as dentist demographics.

Compared with dentists working solo or with one other dentist, dentists in practices with 11 or more dentists had about 162 more unique Medicaid patients in a given year. Promoting growth within the segments of the dentist workforce that treat more Medicaid patients could improve dental care accessibility for certain populations.

Other characteristics of dentists who participate in Medicaid are explored in this recent research: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10775587221108751>. ■

EXPECTED NUMBER OF MEDICAID PATIENTS PER DENTIST BY PRACTICE SIZE



Ask the Expert:

DO I HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO GO INTO SOLO PRACTICE?

BY DIANA TALPA, MBA — BMO HARRIS BANK

Dear Diana: *I'm feeling a bit of a confidence block. I grew up helping my parents with their small business and spent many evenings and weekends laboring alongside them. I even took on a moonlighting job during my residency. I've worked as an associate dentist for two different employers, and I feel I am clinically and financially ready to open a private practice. How do I know if I'm mentally ready to be my own boss? — No Stranger to Hard Work*

Dear No Stranger: When it comes to solo practice, a lot is said about financial readiness, but not so much about mental readiness. Putting leadership skills to the test is often an area that future practice owners feel uncertain about.

Here is how to assess your leadership abilities:

1. Know yourself

Understanding your strengths and weaknesses will help you uncover gaps in your ability to lead. Ask yourself:

- Do I manage my time and energy efficiently throughout the day?
- How quickly do I respond to changes and capitalize on opportunities?
- Do I exercise self-control and keep my composure in difficult situations?

Be willing to look at yourself from an outsider's lens. Based on what you see, create a development strategy to help you grow as a leader.

2. Find a buddy

Having a support system is paramount, be it friends or relatives in the field or a mentor who can help you fine-tune your leadership skills and give you constructive feedback. Regularly schedule time together, and ensure you're making the most of your time by establishing upfront goals, such as knowledge sharing and recognition opportunities. In this way, your personal and professional connections can be valuable, long-term career advisers.

3. Boost your confidence

Encourage yourself with positive talk. Can you visualize yourself as a successful dental practice owner? Even if you don't have all the answers to questions about the nitty-gritty details of how to start, grow and run your practice (pro tip: nobody does), if you can visualize yourself as a successful solo practitioner, you will succeed when it's time to act.

You wouldn't be where you are today if you didn't demonstrate leadership qualities. Use this time to evaluate what's working and what's not, and what you might wish to change about yourself. Remember, leadership is a journey in which there's always room to improve. ■

Ms. Talpa works with privately held companies to consistently deliver innovative, industry-specific financing and cash management solutions to meet their diverse needs. As a vice president in commercial banking at BMO Harris Bank, she leverages her background in business valuations, financial analysis and commercial credit underwriting to add value, foster long-lasting relationships and — above all — help dentists realize their vision for practice success.

Societies draw new dentists

WITH BEVY OF EVENTS, RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

BY JEAN WILLIAMS

There is a lot vying for the attention of new dentists — new associateships to consider, practices to size up for potential purchase, student and practice loans to pay back, and much more.

How do dental societies attract some of their attention, then?

Engagement may look a bit different depending on the society, but the challenges are similar — encouraging busy new dentists to get involved in organized dentistry, perhaps to even seek leadership roles, take on the challenges of advocacy and, in turn, appreciate the value that organized dentistry returns to the individual as well as to the profession.

To accomplish such goals in St. Louis, the Greater St. Louis Dental Society maintains a robust slate of new dentist events, around five each year, with different engagement aims. In September, the society hosted its annual New Dentist Welcome Event with tacos, drinks, arcade games and raffle prizes.

Food and fun are often part of the mix, but they also keep a keen eye trained on bolstering the ranks of leadership where needed. Their efforts bear good results, as the local dental society reports 260 new dentist members, including several who are in the House of Delegates and on the Board of Directors.

Greater St. Louis Dental Society New Dentist Committee Chair Kirthi Tata, D.D.S., exemplifies leadership by being a busy example that also includes encouraging advocacy.

"I actually happen to be the American Dental Political Action Committee new dentist person too," Dr. Tata said. "I have my hands in a lot of different things."

Dr. Tata said the society has many positions and committees, and she and others do their part to help spread the word about openings and recruit interested new dentists.

"For me, since I have had a little bit more of a role with the advocacy part, I have tried to bring in continuing education or



Dr. Tata



Dr. Wanamaker

events or try to find a way to weave that in with the new dentist events," she said.

The New York State Dental Association began offering its Survival Guide Series: Setting You Up for Success to new dentists in 2021, offering them a range of valuable webinars with essential information relevant to new dentists. The five-part lecture series covered wellness and mental health, financial planning, starting a practice, and leveraging online reviews to grow your practice.

"When COVID hit, we recognized the importance of providing virtual content to our new dentist members," said James Wanamaker, D.D.S., who is the ADA New Dentist Committee 2nd District representative and immediate past New York State Dental Association NDC chair. "We sought out speakers that could present information our New Dentist Committee felt was most essential to success as a recent graduate."

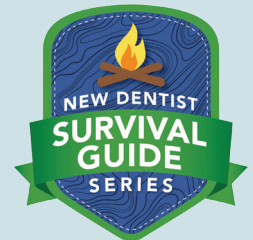
Dr. Wanamaker sees the series as hitting its aim.

"Our attendance and registrations doubled from our first to our second year even during a time when many were burned out from Zoom meetings, so our topics must have resonated with new dentists," he said. "Our best-attended session was on legal contracts as a new dentist ranging from associate contracts to purchasing a practice."

Dr. Wanamaker said that the New York New Dentist Committee is currently planning a hybrid model of both virtual and in-person events for 2023.

Visit the websites of your local and state dental societies to find out what resources and activities they offer for new dentists. For more from the ADA, visit [ADA.org/newdentistcommittee](https://www.ada.org/newdentistcommittee). ■

→ LEARN MORE



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