wmdds
West Michigan District Dental Society

Bulletin

FALL 2026 | VOL. 58, NO. 5

Inside this issue:

Your Friendly Neighborhood Office Dog

wmdds
West Michigan District Dental Society

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The *Bulletin* of the West Michigan Dental Society is published six times a year (the winter issue, spring issue, summer issue, directory issue, fall issue, and holiday issue). The opinions expressed in the *Bulletin* are not necessarily the opinions of the West Michigan District Dental Society.

Contributions to the *Bulletin* are welcome and should be addressed to the *Bulletin* Editor at *WMDDSBulletin@gmail.com*. Requests for purchase of advertising space should be directed to the Advertising Editor, Elaine Fleming, 616-916-8559. The deadline is the first of the month prior to publication.

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Mission Statement

The *Bulletin* is the newsletter of the WMDDS and its mission is to inform the membership of upcoming and recent events, state & local issues related to dentistry, and as a forum for its officers, representatives, and members to discuss appropriate topics of interest to the membership.

Communication & Advertising Policy

The *Bulletin* will publish submitted articles from members and others that relate to the practice of dentistry, small business, social or political issues affecting dentists, or other subjects of interest to the membership. All published items are subject to space restrictions and the community standards of the WMDDS. The editors reserve the right to reject any article or advertisement deemed inappropriate and to edit submissions as they see fit.

Submission & Publication Policy: Articles and advertisements must be submitted no later than the 1st of the month preceding publication date. The *Bulletin* has six publications: the winter issue, spring issue, summer issue, directory issue, fall issue, and holiday issue. Direct submissions or correspondences to:

Sabrina Wadood | 586.214.7693
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ADVERTISERS INDEX

The *Bulletin* wishes to thank our valued advertisers who support organized dentistry by helping to defray the cost of printing and mailing.

Advertising in the *Bulletin* is seen by over 90% of the dentists in the West Michigan District. This includes five of the fastest growing counties in the state: Kent, Ottawa, Ionia, Montcalm, and Mecosta.

For information on advertising rates, call Elaine Fleming, WMDDS Executive Secretary at 616-916-8559. Target your market—advertise in the *Bulletin!*

DDS Integration ..... outside back cover
DHP 17
First Companies 19
KLAS Solutions 16
MDA IFG 20

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Table of Contents

SECTION ONE: WHAT'S NEW IN WEST MICHIGAN

Editor's Letter: Fight the End of Year Burnout 2
President's Message: Consistency Is Key 3
County Updates 4
Society Updates 5
An Interfaith Dental Program Update 6
2026 Directory Corrections/Additions 7

SECTION TWO: OUR COMMUNITY

Tripartite Update 9
Feature Story: Your Friendly Neighborhood Office Dog 10

SECTION THREE: CLINICAL CORNER / CLINICAL PEARLS

Phased Build-Outs: Planning for the Future Without Sacrificing the Present 14
Dentist Burnout: Why the Practice Owner Is the Last to Get Help 15

SECTION FOUR: CLASSIFIED ADS

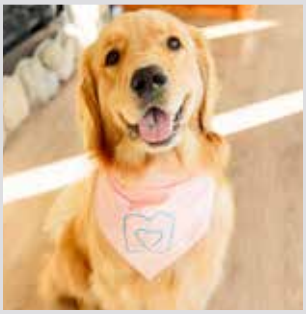
Classified Ads 18

About the Cover

A few of your colleagues' office pets are highlighted in this issue! Read about how they are able to incorporate their furry friends into their everyday practice.

Fight the End of Year Burnout

By Sabrina Wadood, DDS
WMDDS Editor



You might be surprised to see a few furry friends on the cover of this issue! What do dogs have to do with dentistry? For some offices, they have a lot to do with each other. There are a few local practices in West Michigan that employ a dental therapy dog, or support animal, to help improve patient experiences. Undergoing dental treatment can be stressful for many patients, and a dental therapy dog's presence can be calming and comforting for many. A dental therapy dog is not considered a service animal, nor is it considered an emotional support animal. Many offices will have their support animal undergo training and certifications to be considered a dental therapy dog and have the dog in the op during the procedure. Some offices do less formal training and just having the dog's presence in the office is enough to satisfy many an anxious patient. In this issue, you will have your most pressing questions answered on how some dental practices are able to bring a support animal to work and still maintain a professional, safe, and clean environment for their patients. I reached out to two local pediatric dental offices and one general dentistry practice to see how they were able to incorporate their pet into their workforce and the impact it has had on their practice.

These offices have made a unique effort to make the dental visit more fun and comfortable for their patients—and even their staff. How can you do something to make your office more fun and exciting—not just for your patients, but also for YOU? Burnout and ailing mental health are only becoming more and more common in the field of dentistry, and I urge you to take a few minutes to focus on yourself and how you can make your office a better place for you to go to work and your home a better place for you to rest, reset, and recoup. You'll find another article in this issue about how to recognize burnout and what steps you can take to fix it before it consumes you. And if you can, take a few extra minutes and check on a friend or colleague in your field and make sure they are doing okay, too.

Best of luck and wishing you a happy holiday season ahead!

Consistency Is Key

By Travis Mattson, DDS
WMDDS President

Dear colleagues,

Fall is one of my favorite times of year in West Michigan. The changing colors, cooler temperatures, and return to familiar routines make this season a natural time for reflection. As we settle into the final months of the year, it's also a good opportunity to consider how we can continue growing, both personally and professionally.

I've recently been thinking about a concept from Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great,* that I believe has particular relevance to our profession: "the flywheel effect." Collins describes how lasting success rarely comes from a single breakthrough, dramatic change, or extraordinary effort. Instead, greatness is built through small, consistent actions that gradually create momentum. Each improvement builds upon the last, and over time, those seemingly insignificant efforts can produce remarkable results.

I think this concept translates especially well to dentistry.

As dentists, we invest considerable time and resources into improving our clinical skills. We attend continuing education courses, adopt new technologies, and learn new techniques, all with the goal of providing better care for our patients. These pursuits are important, but I would argue that some of our greatest opportunities for improvement are found in the ordinary moments of our clinical day.

Perhaps it's taking an extra minute to carefully evaluate occlusion following a restoration. Maybe it's improving how we explain a diagnosis so patients better understand their treatment options. It could be consistently reviewing medical histories with a more critical eye, taking better clinical photographs, or simply slowing down enough to listen to a patient's concerns before jumping into a treatment recommendation.

None of these actions are particularly groundbreaking. Yet when practiced consistently, they can meaningfully improve clinical outcomes, patient trust, and our own professional satisfaction.

The same principle applies beyond the operatory. Small investments in mentoring a younger colleague, recognizing a team member's contributions, or strengthening relationships within our dental community can have a lasting impact. As members of the West Michigan District Dental Society, we have an opportunity to build that momentum not only within our individual practices but across our profession.

So here's my challenge to you this fall: Identify one small thing you could do better in your daily practice and commit to doing it consistently for the next 30 days. It doesn't need to be complicated or expensive. In fact, the simpler it is, the more likely it is to become a lasting habit. At the end of those 30 days, reflect on whether that small change made a difference. If it did, keep doing it, and find the next opportunity to improve.

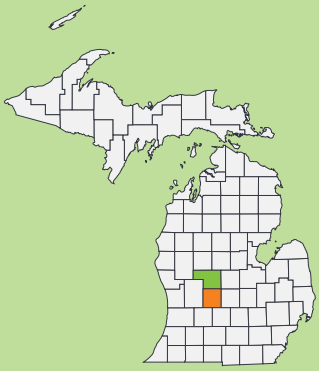
We often measure professional growth through the courses we've completed, the technologies we've adopted, or the procedures we've mastered. But perhaps an equally important measure is how consistently we execute the fundamentals.

Great dentistry isn't built in a day. It's built one patient, one procedure, and one thoughtful decision at a time.

I hope you're all finding some time to enjoy the beautiful fall season here in West Michigan. Thank you for your continued commitment to our patients, our colleagues, and our profession. It's a privilege to serve alongside you as President of the West Michigan District Dental Society.

Sincerely,

Travis Mattson, DDS
President, West Michigan District Dental Society



Ionia/Montcalm County

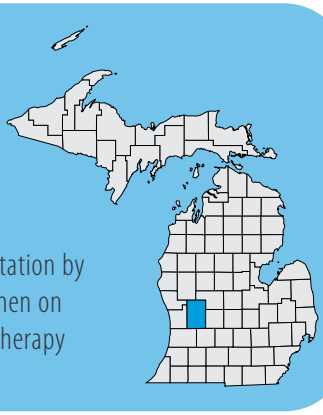
Sarah Bouwkamp, DDS
WMDDS Ionia/Montcalm County Representative
bouwkamp.sarah@gmail.com

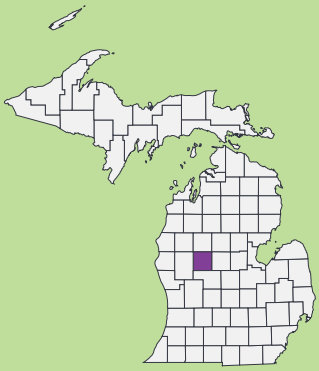
Ionia County held a fall CE event in late October, sponsored by NDX Labs. Stay tuned for more events to come.

Kent County

Derrick Walker, DMD
WMDDS Kent County Vice President and Representative
derrickjameswalker@gmail.com

Kent County is hosting a CE event with oral surgeon Dr. Andy Baker on November 4. The next events will be on January 20, 2027, with a presentation by endodontist Dr. Eshwar Arasu on "Endodontic Pain Management," and then on March 10 by Dr. Deborah Brown, presenting on "Understanding Dental Therapy and its Role in Michigan's Dental Workforce."





Mecosta County

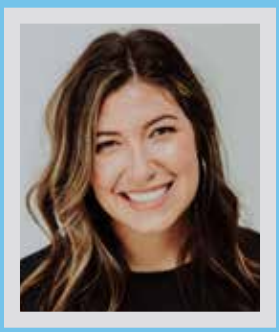
Cassandra Cao, DDS
WMDDS Ionia/Montcalm County Representative
cmschwab18@gmail.com

Mecosta County welcomes new representative, Dr. Cassie Cao! WMDDS thanks you for your service to the organization as county representative.

Ottawa County

Kevin Rebhan, DDS
WMDDS Ottawa County Representative
kevin.rebhan@gmail.com

Ottawa County welcomes new representative, Dr. Kevin Rebhan! WMDDS thanks you for your service to the organization as county representative.



Kent County Oral Health Coalition

Cassie Harter, RDH, MPH, *Steering Committee of Kent County Oral Health Coalition*
clpawloski@gmail.com | kentcountyoralhealthcoalition@gmail.com

The organization provided oral hygiene supplies for a couple of community events for our coalition partners in September and October, including the Veterans Stand Down event in Millenium Park and Trunk or Treat in Kentwood. We have an upcoming all coalition meeting on November 5th, where we'll be hearing about some statewide oral health initiatives of the Rural Health Transformation Grant as well as some legislative updates from the Michigan Oral Health Coalition.

New Dentist Forum

Sabrina Wadood, DDS, *New Dentist Forum Chairperson*
wmddsnewdentistforum@gmail.com

The NDF held its first CE meeting on October 8 with a presentation by Lindsay Cummings and Scott Kraemer of Kuiper Kraemer PC on "Legacy and Trust Planning: A Legal Blueprint for Success: Integrating Business, Real Estate, and Estate Planning for the Modern Dentist." This event was open to members and spouses and we had a great turn out with valuable take-aways.

Our next CE event will be on November 19 and will include a presentation by local prosthodontist Dr. Lisa Kane of Great Lakes Prosthodontics. The topic is "Treatment Planning Considerations for Implant Restorations: What we Have Learned to Optimize Success from a Prosthetic Perspective."

Dr. Sabrina Wadood, Chair

Dr. Art Doering, Co-Chair

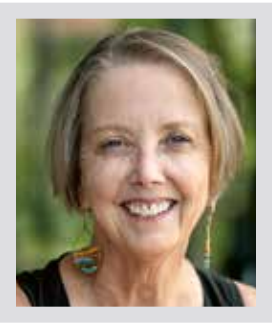
Dr. Jayne Kessel, Co-Chair

West Michigan Dental Foundation

Gary Scott, DDS, *WMDF President*
glsdds1996@gmail.com

The WMDF has approved a total of $30,050 in community grant awards to nine different local organizations dedicated to improving dental health and/or access to care.

An Interfaith Dental Program Update



By Colette Smiley, DDS

Since 2022, the Interfaith Dental Program has connected new Americans across Michigan with compassionate dentists willing to help restore healthy smiles. Refugee resettlement agencies, community organizations, and faith communities refer patients. By volunteering to see just one patient, you can make a life-changing difference for someone who is working hard to build a new life in our community.

Participating is designed to be simple and flexible. You provide care in your own office with your own team, determine the treatment plan you believe is appropriate, and receive reimbursement according to the program's guidelines through a straightforward email submission process. Our goal is to make volunteering both meaningful and manageable.

Would you be willing to care for just one patient?

For more information or to register as a provider, please contact Program Manager Suzy Bai at *interfaithdental@christchurchcranbrook.org*. You can also find more information on the website: *https://www.interfaithdental.org*.

Your generosity can restore not only oral health, but also confidence, dignity, and hope.

One patient. One smile. One life changed.

2026 Directory Corrections/Additions

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4475 WILSON AVE SW
SUITE #8
GRANDVILLE, MI 49418
616-498-1992 FAX 800-875-7862

*** KECK, PAUL J**
6566 WINDEMERE WAY
HOLLAND, MICHIGAN 49423

LUCA, JENNIFER (PEDIATRIC DENTIST)
3810 - 32ND AVE
SUITE 500
HUDSONVILLE, MI 49426
616-777-3206

*** TABASH, JOHN (LIFE MEMBER)**
HOLLAND, MI
616-848-2006

YOUNG, EDWARD
5749 - 28TH STREET SW (ORTHODONTIST)
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49546
616-259-5887
5390 BRASSIE COURT SE
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49546
edyoungdds@gmail.com

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SUITE A
ROCKFORD, MI 49341
616-874-6040

BULAR, KAYLEE
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HUDSONVILLE, MI 49426
616-209-4024

HENEIN, JOSEPH
5916 LAKE MICHIGAN DRIVE
ALLENDALE. MI 49401
616-895-7400

KIM, SEUNGCHAN
2021 - 44TH STREET SE
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49508
616-281-8338

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Oral Pathology in Daily Practice: Essential Knowledge and Skills for the Dental Team

Presented by Drs. Brent Accurso & Brent Martin

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Your Membership Working for You!

ADA

- The CDT 2027 and Coding Companion Kit with App is available for purchase now! This guide has 67 code updates, including 28 new codes and 33 revisions, and combines the official CDT code set with practical training to help reduce errors, strengthen documentation, and support more consistent insurance claim acceptance.
- The ADA House of Delegates has voted NOT to increase your membership dues for 2027. Your active member dues will remain at $627.
- The ADA has updated their recommended ADA Health History Patient Forms to include mental health questions and GLP-1 questions. The updated forms can be purchased for use in your practice at the ADA Store online. The ADA recommends patients complete comprehensive health history forms every two years at your practice.

ADA American Dental Association®
America's leading advocate for oral health

MDA

- Annual Session is coming up in late spring in Grand Rapids. Save the date: May 20–22, 2027.
- Don't forget to check out the updated Member Benefits Guide at *michigandental.org*. There are many benefits you get with your membership such as discounts on a variety of insurance plans, affordable CE, personalized HR consultations and team management resources, and access to exclusive savings and discounts with MDA Services for many companies you may already be using.
- MDA's LEAD program is accepting applications until November 18 for their 2027 program. The LEAD program is a comprehensive, twelve-month program that helps you build your personal leadership skills, experience many facets of organized dentistry, and prepare for future leadership roles.

mda michigan dental ASSOCIATION
YOUR CONNECTION TO ORAL HEALTH®

WMDDS

- The WMDDS held its first CE on October 23 and sold out to a full house with wonderful presenters and sponsors. Save the date for the next CE lecture in March. See details on the inside back cover.
- The Silent Bell Awards have been scheduled for October 7, 2027 at The Goei Center with some exciting changes. Please save the date! Watch for more details.
- Don't forget to vote for your colleagues to represent West Michigan at the MDA House of Delegates! Delegation voting ballots will go out in November and the deadline for return is November 30. Keep an eye out for your ballots and candidate bios.

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West Michigan District Dental Society

Your Friendly Neighborhood Office Dog

Submitted by Sabrina Wadood, DDS

Have you ever wondered what it's like to be able to take your furry best friend to the office every day? Have you considered bringing in a support animal to the office but just not sure how to make it work? Most support animals tend to be dogs, as they are easy to groom and train. I picked the brains of local colleagues who offer support animals or therapy dogs in their practice and what the impact has been to their businesses.

Dr. Nick Ritzema, Dentist
Complete Health Dentistry

Drs. Katie Swanson and
Stephanie Kloostra, Pediatric Dentists
PDS of West Michigan

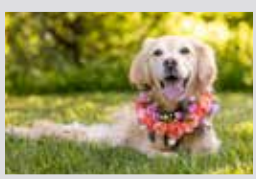
Dr. Chris Powell,
Pediatric Dentist
Stellar Smiles
Pediatric Dentistry

How long have you had a support animal in your office, and what type of animal is it? What type of training was involved?

We've had Patrick, our goldendoodle, as part of our team at Complete Health Dentistry of West Michigan for three years. Patrick hasn't undergone a formal "therapy dog" certification. Instead, he received extensive training at home in a busy household full of kids, which helped him become comfortable around people, activity, and different environments. We continue to reinforce good behavior to ensure he is calm and well-mannered in the office.

We have two therapy dogs at Pediatric Dental Specialists of West Michigan, Lucy (golden retriever) and Zuri (Samoyed). We have had them at our office for several years, and they are a huge part of our office family. We, as staff, enjoy having them just as much as our patients. Both dogs are certified through a local therapy dog organization. They were taken through three different locations with a therapy dog instructor and we passed a written test to have them certified.

We have had a therapy dog in our office since before the doors opened to patients! Piper is a golden retriever, and completed roughly two years of training. The first year was focused on basic obedience training and simple commands. The second year we focused more on dental specific training: familiarizing her with the sights, sounds, and smells of a dental office which can be extremely overwhelming for a dog. We also added more advanced commands. A favorite among our patients is Piper's "cuddle" command, where she jumps in the patient chair and cuddles with the patient during treatment.

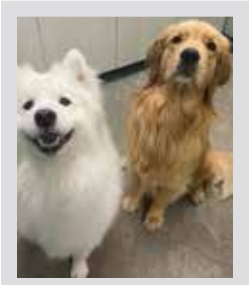


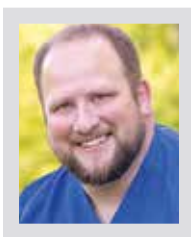
What prompted you to add a support animal to your dental practice?

At CHD, providing an exceptional patient experience and fostering a positive, supportive team culture is just as important as the clinical care we deliver. We want every patient to feel welcomed, valued, and cared for from the moment they walk through our doors. Patrick is a fun extension of that philosophy! We know visiting the dentist can create anxiety, and Patrick brings a unique kind of comfort to the experience. Sometimes, a simple interaction with him can help someone relax, smile, or take their mind off their nerves. He also brings joy to our team and adds to the fun, welcoming culture we work hard to create. For us, he's another way to make our office feel less clinical and more personal.

We are all dog lovers at our office and know just how calming a dog's presence can be, so we decided to share our dogs with our little patients!

It has helped many of our young patients manage anxiety leading up to and during their dental visits.

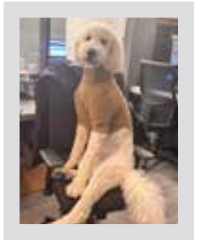




I am an animal lover (I was even a wildlife biologist before I was a dentist!) so I was aware of the capabilities of highly trained working dogs. As a pediatric dentist, managing the emotions of my patients can be a challenge. Having a gentle, well behaved dog in the office really makes them feel at home and comfortable, which helps us start off on the right foot.

When or how do you decide which patients use the support animal? How do you factor it into scheduling and logistics to make sure the animal is not double-booked?

Patrick is available to patients upon request, but we don't have a formal scheduling system for him. He can typically be found hanging around the front desk, greeting people and interacting with patients who are interested. If a patient would like to spend time with him, we do our best to accommodate that request. Since we don't schedule him for specific appointments or treatment rooms, there's no formal double-booking process.



Our goal is to personalize the patient experience while respecting individual preferences. We want patients to feel that their needs matter, and we want our team to have the flexibility to create those special moments without adding unnecessary complexity to their day.

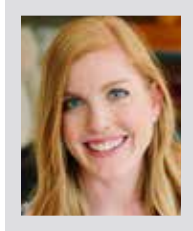
We have signs around the office, and our dogs typically hang out at the front desk area—which is visible to our patients—so whenever a patient asks to see one of the dogs, we bring them out for some pets! If a patient would like a dog present during their appointment, we make a note on our schedule. We usually have Lucy or Zuri present at the office, and sometimes both are here on the same day.

Piper has a regular two-day-a-week schedule, and patients are informed at the time of scheduling that there will be a therapy dog in the office on the day of their appointment. Patients are booked as normal, and Piper typically just follows me from patient to patient. This allows every patient a chance to interact with her (although many kids have a hard time saying goodbye!).

How do you manage patients with allergies? Is there a specific room assigned only for patients who want the support animal?

Patrick has a more traditional poodle-like coat that tends to shed less, although no dog is completely hypoallergenic. We have him groomed every two weeks to keep him clean and well-maintained. We want everyone to feel comfortable and welcome in our office, so we're always mindful of allergies and respectful of each patient's individual needs and preferences. Patrick is typically found around the front desk, and we don't have a dedicated treatment room for patients who want to interact with him. Instead, we approach this through communication and flexibility. Providing an exceptional experience means recognizing that everyone is different and making sure each patient feels respected and comfortable.

Piper is professionally groomed regularly to reduce the amount of dander. We also have lint rollers in the office for anyone who needs them. She is never in the office on Tuesdays or Thursdays, so patients with more severe allergies are seen on those days.



Since Samoyeds are hypoallergenic, we ensure Zuri is present whenever a patient has allergies.

What are some of the positives and some of the negatives of having a support animal on staff?

The positives go beyond what Patrick brings to our patients. He adds warmth, personality, and joy to our office. He can be a wonderful icebreaker for nervous patients, helps create positive interactions, and makes the dental experience feel more welcoming and personal. He also contributes to our team culture. We believe a great workplace should be a place where people enjoy spending time together, feel supported, and have fun along the way. Patrick is a small but meaningful part of what makes our office feel unique, and it's hard not to smile when he's around!

The biggest challenges are the logistics and added responsibility. We have to build time into our day for Patrick's bathroom breaks and playtime to help him burn off energy so he can be calm and comfortable in the office. Because of his coat type and our commitment to keeping him clean in a healthcare setting, he also visits the groomer every two weeks. This requires additional time and financial investment, along with consistent hygiene practices and consideration for patients with allergies or fears.

Ultimately, having Patrick is incredibly rewarding, but it requires planning, flexibility, and responsibility from our team. We believe that creating an outstanding patient experience starts with building an outstanding team culture. Patrick helps us bring both together, making our office a place where patients feel cared for and our team has another reason to smile.

Positives: the entire team agrees children are more cooperative for treatment on days when Piper is in the office. She is heavily featured in our marketing, which has helped our office grow quickly over the first three years. It is also a good stress release for my team because Piper can always tell when someone is stressed.

Cons: All of my patients like her better than me, which hurts my feelings (just kidding). It does add some small amount of stress to my day since I am worried about my schedule and making sure Piper's needs are being met.

On the whole, for my office, the pros definitely outweigh the cons, and I plan to continue using therapy dogs in my office as long as I am practicing!

Honestly, there are no negatives for us! Having a therapy dog here is a bonus for us as staff and we enjoy their company.

Practice Pearls

Submitted by Sabrina Wadood, DDS

Phased Build-Outs: Planning for the Future Without Sacrificing the Present

By Dr. Chris Powell
Stellar Smiles Pediatric Dentistry
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Byron Center, MI 49315
www.stellarsmilespediatricdentistry.com

In today's business environment, with both costs and interest rates increasing, running a dental startup is more difficult than it was even five years ago. In many cases, lending limits for new businesses have not caught up with inflation, and practice founders may have to make some difficult choices trying to achieve their vision without going over budget.

Stellar Smiles Pediatric Dentistry opened our doors three years ago, and I faced many of those challenges. I had a vision of what my practice should look like to attract the patients I want and to treat them in the environment I want, but lenders at the time were being fairly strict about startup loan limits, which wouldn't have allowed me to build the practice I wanted.

I had several meetings with my contractor to discuss these problems. They would present cheaper finishes, cut out fun decorative elements, etc., but it just didn't feel right. Why would I spend all this money to build a practice I didn't even like? So we started thinking in different terms, what if we built it the way we wanted, but only finish the areas we needed?

We came up with a plan that broke construction into phases. In phase I, the building shell was completed and the waiting room, three treatment rooms, sterilization, and a consult room were finished. The rest of the space was concrete floor and drywall, hidden behind doors so as not to affect the patient experience. This allowed me to not cut corners on my vision, but still have plenty of space for what I needed at the time.

Phase II came about six months later, once we had built up a patient base and needed an expanded area for hygiene. This phase added a three-chair hygiene bay, a private office, and a fully finished space upstairs for employees. I did need to request more money to finish this part of the office, but with production records and new patient flow the banks were happy to do it.

Now after three years we have finished phase III, which added another hygiene bay, treatment room, and associate's office. By planning ahead, we were able to avoid any financing for this phase of construction. We have had no complaints from patients about construction noise, and all were surprised to learn that there were any unfinished spaces!

This approach may not work for everyone, but in three years it has allowed me to create a ten-chair practice with mid to high-end finishes, avoid needing any additional guarantors on any loans, and greatly decreased the amount of interest I've had to pay on financing. If I could go back, I wouldn't change a thing.

Dentist Burnout: Why the Practice Owner Is the Last to Get Help

By Martha Fernandez, LCSW
cerevity.com

Martha Fernandez, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker with eight years of clinical experience and co-founder of CEREVITY, a private-pay concierge network of independent licensed clinicians built for high achievers, including physicians and dentists. She is the author of "Wired to Burn: A Therapist's Guide for High Achievers Running on Fumes."

In the Winter 2026 *Bulletin,* Dr. Sabrina Wadood urged members to start taking care of their own smiles: their backs, their hearing, their stress, and their happiness. It was good advice, and the stretches between patients are worth doing. This article picks up where self-care runs out, at the long delay before a dentist asks for real help.

The Numbers Behind the Chair

Dentists are not imagining the strain. In an April 2023 survey by the ADA Council on Communications of about 500 member dentists, more than 90% reported some kind of stress about their careers. More than 40% said that at least once a month over the previous six months they had felt defeated, wanted to quit dentistry, or did not want to go to work. Those feelings were more common among dentists 44 and younger.

Practice owners carry a double load. They are the clinician responsible for every crown and extraction, and they are also the employer, the HR department, the person who signed the lease, and the one who worries about payroll when the schedule has holes. When something gives, it is rarely the clinical work. It is sleep, family time, and the owner's own health.

Why Owners Wait

Research on how dentists seek mental health care is thin, so the closest data comes from medicine. In a 2026 review of 297 physicians who sought therapy through the CEREVITY network, 61% had delayed care over licensing, credentialing, or professional visibility concerns. That is a group of people who did eventually get help, not a random sample, but anyone who has filled out a license renewal or a credentialing application will recognize the fear.

CEREVITY's State of Physician Wellbeing report describes the pattern as the Competence Trap Model, and it translates almost word for word to the operatory. It has four phases:

- **Absorption.** Production holds while the effort behind it climbs. Charting, treatment plans, and payroll move into the evenings.
- **Concealment.** The strain is managed privately, because "looking fine" feels like part of the job in front of patients, staff, and the study club.
- **Erosion.** Sleep, patience, and attention slip. The dentist is still performing, but the margin for error is thinner.
- **Collapse.** A leave, a rushed sale of the practice, a health scare, or a decision to walk away from dentistry. By then everyone can see it.

The better a dentist is at holding production steady, the later anyone notices, including the dentist.

Four Moves That Do Not Require a Crisis

1. Read the actual question before assuming the worst. Many health professionals avoid care because they assume it will have to be reported somewhere. Pull up your license renewal and any hospital or insurance credentialing applications and read the exact wording. Questions differ from form to form, and the fear is often broader than the text. If you are unsure how a question applies to you, ask a health law attorney before you skip care, not after. Michigan also runs the Health Professional Recovery Program (HPRP) through the Department

of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. The State describes it as a confidential, non-disciplinary program for licensed health professionals dealing with substance use or a mental health problem. Its toll-free number is 800-453-3784.

2. Choose confidential care that sits outside the practice. In a close regional dental community, the therapist your hygienist sees or the counselor who spoke at the last component meeting can feel too close. Telehealth with a licensed clinician outside your local referral circle removes that worry. Ask any clinician directly how records are kept and who can see them. You are entitled to a clear answer.

3. Block one protected hour a week that the front desk cannot book. Treat it like a surgical appointment. Use it for therapy, a run, a long lunch, or nothing at all. If that hour keeps getting filled, that tells you how close to the edge the schedule is running.

4. Build a coverage plan before you need it. Talk now with an associate, a nearby colleague, or a study club peer about how emergencies and short absences would be covered. Owners put off care partly because they cannot picture stepping away without the practice suffering. A plan made on a calm Tuesday makes the hard week easier.

Signs Worth Taking Seriously

Strain in dentists tends to surface outside the operatory first. Watch for evenings spent finishing notes or reworking the schedule, sleep that no longer restores, a shorter fuse with staff or family, and a growing reluctance to see friends from dental school or the study club because every conversation turns to production. Another early sign is Sunday night dread that has nothing to do with a difficult case on Monday's schedule. If two or more of these have lasted several weeks, treat them the way you would treat a radiograph that shows early decay: the simplest and least expensive point to intervene is now, not when it starts to hurt.

The same goes for a colleague. A private, specific remark such as "You've seemed worn down since spring. How are you really doing?" can open a door that no article can. Often the person who is struggling has been waiting for someone to ask first.

Self-Care Is the Floor, Not the Ceiling

Stretching, better ergonomics, and a good CE course all help. They were not designed for the dentist who has been white-knuckling it for two years. If you recognize yourself in the Concealment or Erosion phase, the most useful thing you can do this month is talk with someone trained to help, before the schedule makes the decision for you.

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The Connected Practice: Boosting Team Performance Through Effective Communication

Presented by Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP | Friday, March 12, 2027 | 9:00 am to 4:00 pm | Watermark Country Club | CE Credits: 6

Jodi Schafer is a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR, SHRM-SCP) and the owner of Human Resource Management Services. Jodi has a bachelor's degree in psychology and education from Kalamazoo College and more than 20 years of experience in human resource management. She was recognized as one of the "10 Over the Next Ten" in the next generation of business leaders by the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, and accepted the MSAE Association Choice award on behalf of HRM for the consulting services category. Jodi sits on several statewide committees focused on human resource policy and leadership development. She is a regular contributor to various industry publications including the *MDA Journal*. Jodi is co-author of the MDA's ready-to-use HR system (Staff Matters) and she conducts speaking engagements and training seminars on all aspects of human resources including employee relations, leadership skills, performance development, on-boarding, recruitment and retention.

Transform your dental practice into a high-performing team by mastering the art of modern communication. This interactive workshop empowers your entire staff to increase productivity by learning to "speak the language" of every colleague and patient with the help of personality profiling. We will bridge generational gaps and set clear office norms for using technology, ensuring your team stays efficient without losing the human empathy that builds patient loyalty. By the end of the day, your team will have the professional tools to resolve conflicts directly and build a culture of mutual respect and high-stakes success.

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