



# new dentist news



Anytime, anywhere: Dr. Brooke Fukuoka looks at patient photos and videos taken by her hygienist while she is away in Boston at the 2020 Yankee Dental Congress.

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Using virtual technology to conduct remote evaluations

## COVID-19 pandemic shines light on telehealth services

### NEW DENTISTS MAY DRIVE INCREASED FUTURE ADOPTION OF TELEDENTISTRY, EXPERT SAYS

BY MARY BETH VERSACI

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Dr. Brooke Fukuoka and her team were no longer able to go into long-term care facilities to see their patients.

For Dr. Fukuoka's practice, which specializes in providing dental care to adults who have disabilities and seniors who have limited mobility, teledentistry became key.

"During COVID-19, teledentistry has been a godsend," said Dr. Fukuoka, owner of Your Special Smiles in Jerome, Idaho.

*Continued on Page 4.*

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# PROTECTING DENTAL PRACTICES AGAINST cyber attacks

BY JENNIFER GARVIN



Dr. Michael Saba

Is your office protected from a ransomware attack?

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued an alert, warning businesses to be on the lookout for criminals who “are increasingly exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Ransomware is a form of malware where outside attackers remotely lock computer files and then demand a financial “ransom” to unlock the files.

Dr. Michael Saba said he never put too much thought into cybersecurity until he needed to replace the server in his Union, New Jersey, dental practice. He figured he’d hire an outside company to take care of it but said the quotes for the service were so far-ranging that he set out on a journey to educate himself.

“I started going down this rabbit hole learning about cybersecurity,” Dr. Saba said. “And it turns out that even with the best, most sophisticated stuff, it doesn’t really matter what system you get. Because if you’re not being diligent about training your staff about not opening attachments, then it doesn’t matter.”

Mike Del Giudice, a consultant specializing in information security and data privacy, agreed, saying, “the human element is what attackers are trying to get to.”

To educate his dental team, Dr. Saba held a cybersecurity training session where they discussed ransomware and ways to prevent an attack.

“I told them, ‘Look, you can’t open any emails if you don’t know that someone specifically sent it to us,’” he said.

Dr. Saba said he also backs up his data frequently and uses a firewall to protect his network.

Training employees and backing up data were among a list of best practices tips Mr. Del Giudice offered in an April webinar for the ADA.

## Other tips included:

- Using an email content filtering system.
- Providing user security awareness by training employees to use strong passwords and how to identify suspicious emails.
- Installing anti-malware software.
- Keeping workstations safer by limiting administrative access when possible.
- Updating systems and testing them regularly against the latest vulnerabilities.
- Planning what to do if you are the victim of a cyberattack.

The ADA also offers tips on protecting dental practices. Visit [Success.ADA.org](https://www.success.ada.org) and search “ransomware” to access all the Association’s resources. The recorded webinar, Ransomware Readiness moderated by Mr. Del Giudice, is a free continuing education course available to all dentists. Visit [ADACEonline.org](https://www.adaceonline.org) and search 425. ■

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James E. Lee, D.M.D.  
[LeeJamesDMD@gmail.com](mailto:LeeJamesDMD@gmail.com)

**District 2 • NY**  
Lauren E. Vitkus, D.D.S.  
[lauren.vitkus@gmail.com](mailto:lauren.vitkus@gmail.com)

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[seth.walbridge@gmail.com](mailto:seth.walbridge@gmail.com)

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[bfukuoka@fhsid.org](mailto:bfukuoka@fhsid.org)

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[daryn@dental32okc.com](mailto:daryn@dental32okc.com)

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[lindsay.compton.dds@gmail.com](mailto:lindsay.compton.dds@gmail.com)

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[acshisler@gmail.com](mailto:acshisler@gmail.com)

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[e.perez3887@gmail.com](mailto:e.perez3887@gmail.com)

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# COVID-19 pandemic shines light on telehealth services

(continued from cover)



**Dr. Nathan Suter**, owner of Green Leaf Dental Care in House Springs, Missouri, and Access Teledentistry.



**Dr. Brooke Fukuoka**, owner of Your Special Smiles in Jerome, Idaho.

According to polling from the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute for the week of April 20, 24% of responding new dentists reported they were conducting remote problem-focused evaluations through virtual technology/telecommunications. By the week of July 13, that percentage dropped to 10%, but teledentistry consultant Dr. Nathan Suter believes the use of that technology will become more mainstream.

"There are a variety of teledentistry applications being applied in response to COVID-19," said Dr. Suter, owner of Green Leaf Dental Care in House Springs, Missouri, and Access Teledentistry, a company that provides teledentistry consulting services for dentists, community health centers and state health departments. "As we move into a new chapter of care delivery, it is apparent that enhanced personal protective equipment and telehealth services will become more commonplace."

New dentists, in particular, may play a role in that trend, he said.

"New dentists are the most likely early adopters since they tend to be willing to adopt new technology and tools," Dr. Suter said. "New dentists also had experience in dental school with coursework that closely resembled a teledentistry examination."

Dr. Suter, who graduated from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry in 2013, uses teledentistry to increase patients' access to hygiene services. If he is traveling or has a conflict, hygiene appointments are not dependent on his schedule because he can perform exams at a later time using hygienists' photographs and detailed assessments, as well as normal preventive and diagnostic imaging. He also can connect with the hygienist and patient via video during an appointment if there is an urgent question.

Especially during the pandemic, teledentistry has helped his practice with limited evaluation and triage, hygiene assessment, satellite office coverage, patient consultations and specialist consultations, and he also hopes to expand community outreach, which has been limited because of COVID-19.

"These applications allow our practice to extend past the physical walls of our building and the hours that I am physically present, in order to bring patients into a dental home from multiple different points of care," Dr. Suter said.

Prior to the pandemic, Dr. Fukuoka's practice established a mobile clinic to care for patients who were unable to be seen in a clinical setting but too medically complex to be treated under general anesthesia in an operating room. The idea was that the familiar, nonmedical setting would make the patients more comfortable and cooperative, she said.

Space was limited in most facilities, making it difficult for both Dr. Fukuoka and a hygienist to treat residents the same day. After Dr. Fukuoka reviewed a patient's medical history, her hygienists would offer mobile hygiene services and collect photographs, videos and X-rays for her to evaluate to see if she needed to go to the facilities to provide care. A dental hygiene student also helped residents in one of the facilities with preventative oral hygiene procedures, such as brushing and flossing their teeth.

"Our unique system combines safe spaces, teledentistry and minimally invasive dentistry to revolutionize the delivery of care for adults who have special needs and seniors in group living facilities," said Dr. Fukuoka, who graduated from the University of Louisville School of Dentistry in 2012.

Since the start of the pandemic, Dr. Fukuoka and her staff have used teledentistry to monitor patients' oral health and guide caregivers as they provide preventative oral hygiene services. Your Special Smiles also received approval from the Idaho State Board of Dentistry to prescribe silver diamine fluoride and allow certified nursing assistants to apply it under Dr. Fukuoka's license.

"During the COVID-19 outbreak, many states changed the scope of practice guidelines to allow the reimbursement and utilization of teledentistry, seeing it as an effective way to increase the practice hours and availability while limiting the amount of people in the office at any one time," Dr. Suter said.

For new dentists looking to incorporate teledentistry into their practices, Dr. Suter recommends they start with a small pilot using only part of their day or some of their staff to test both the technology and their workflow.

Dr. Fukuoka also suggests they determine what works best for their particular team.

"Teledentistry is not as complicated as it sounds, and it has many uses," she said. "Find the use that fits your and your patients' needs." ■



## essential items FOR A MODERN PRACTICE

**Dr. Brian Homann** purchased his Chicago-area practice several years ago and the new dentist quickly learned that there were five pieces of equipment that were essential for his modern office:



- 1. An intraoral camera that connects to a screen that patients can see.** “The intraoral camera was incredibly important in helping to develop a trusting relationship with patients,” he said. “As a new, young dentist, trust had to be earned. One great way to help build trust was to show the patient exactly what I was looking at.”
- 2. A digital radiography system.** The practice he purchased has been utilizing analog radiographs.
- 3. Digital charts,** as opposed to the paper charts the previous dentist had been keeping.
- 4. Practice management software.**
- 5. A phone.** “I am eight years out of dental school and I still try to learn and grow every day. One fantastic way to do that is to pick up your phone and call your specialists, your classmates or people in your study club. Any time I have ever called another dentist, they have always been more than happy to share their knowledge and experiences.” ■

Photo: Westend61 / Getty Images

# Ask the Expert: WHAT DENTAL EQUIPMENT SHOULD I INVEST IN AND WHEN?

BY CHRISTINE OLMSTEAD LOPEZ, CERTIFIED HEALTHCARE FINANCIAL PROFESSIONAL, BMO HARRIS BANK

**Dear Christine:** *I acquired a practice three years ago and have been putting off some much-needed upgrades to equipment and technology. I have my eye on a 3D cone beam imaging system for starters, plus a new sterilization area closer to my treatment rooms. Part of it is the cost: How do I justify \$75,000 or more for these upgrades?*

— Expensive Proposition

**Dear Expensive Proposition:** Acquiring new dental equipment is exciting, but before making a big purchase, it's important to determine if the ROI will be worth the expense and provide benefits to patient care.

Before you decide to invest in practice upgrades, ask some important questions:

- Could you get by with the equipment you currently have and, if so, for how long?

- What is the projected return on investment of the equipment you're considering? Will it increase production, and thereby cash flow?
- Will the upgrades improve your team's job satisfaction and efficiency?
- Finally, and most importantly, what kinds of equipment financing are available to you?

If you buy the right piece of equipment with the wrong financing option, it may have the unintended consequence of hurting your bottom line. There are advantages to both leasing and buying. For example, leasing may allow you to conserve cash. Plus, an equipment leasing company may allow you to trade in a piece of equipment for a new model before the lease ends.

If you're interested in owning equipment outright, a bank may offer a better interest rate than an equipment company. Banks may

also offer payment options not available with leases, such as interest-only payments at the onset of the loan.

To help determine which option is right for you, conduct a lease-versus-buy analysis. You can run the numbers using our interactive tool at [bmoharris.com/dentists](http://bmoharris.com/dentists).

Once you have assembled key pieces of information, you can rest assured that your investment in new equipment and technology is the right choice. ■

*A commercial banker since 2006, Ms. Olmstead Lopez advises mid- to large-size practices, leveraging her background in commercial credit underwriting and structuring, and providing industry-specific expertise and local market insight to add value, foster long-lasting relationships and — above all — helping dentists realize their vision for growth.*

*Editor's note: This article is provided by BMO Harris Bank, the ADA Member Advantage-endorsed provider for practice financing. Call 1-833-276-6017 or visit [bmoharris.com/dentists](http://bmoharris.com/dentists) for more information.*

# Economic Impact OF COVID-19 ON DENTAL PRACTICES

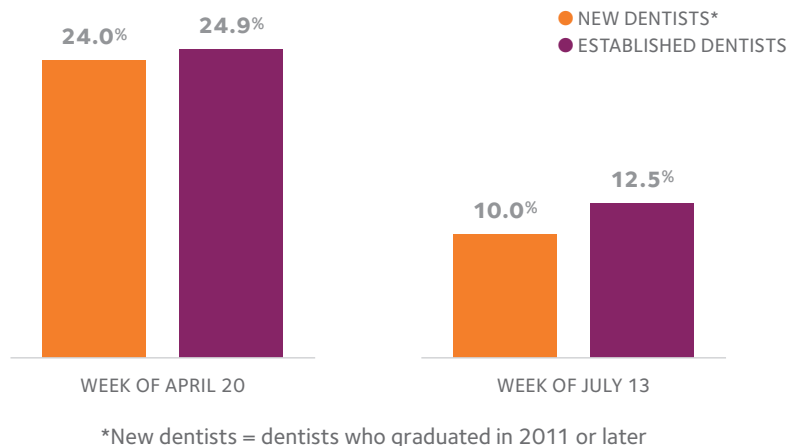
To better understand the impact on dental practices, in March 2020 the ADA Health Policy Institute started a biweekly tracking poll of dentists in private practice. Has the pandemic changed dentists' use of teledentistry?

On two waves of HPI's poll, collecting data for the weeks of April 20 and July 13, survey panelists were asked, "Is your practice currently using virtual technology/telecommunications to conduct remote problem-focused evaluations (CDT Code D0140)?" The latest results show that teledentistry use appears to have been a temporary measure during the COVID-19 shutdown phase of the pandemic, with overall use dropping from April to July. Both new and established dentists reported similar results.

For more results from HPI's COVID-19 Economic Impact on Dental Practice poll, visit [ADA.org/HPI](https://ada.org/HPI). ■



**YES, OUR PRACTICE IS CURRENTLY USING VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY/TELECOMMUNICATIONS TO CONDUCT REMOTE PROBLEM-FOCUSED EVALUATIONS**



Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, COVID-19: Economic Impact on Dental Practices.

## In case you missed it



### The recurring wrinkle in time

Dr. Zaneta Hamlin shares her experience of being a Black woman and a dentist as a call to action for the profession to acknowledge and address racial discrimination and inequality in health care. Visit [ADA.org/wrinkle](https://ada.org/wrinkle) to read the article.



### For Oregon dentist, Supreme Court ruling on DACA offers relief

"Being an undocumented individual, you live with not knowing what will happen," said Dr. Eddie Ramirez. The Portland, Oregon, dentist shares what role the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals program played in his journey to becoming a dentist. Visit [ADA.org/dacaruling](https://ada.org/dacaruling) to read the article.



### What to expect when you're expecting during the COVID-19 pandemic

Four new or soon-to-be parents offer advice to other new dentists on what starting a family may look like during the COVID-19 pandemic, including what challenges to expect to how much time they're taking off of work. Visit [ADA.org/expecting](https://ada.org/expecting) and read the article.

Visit [ADA.org/newdentistnews](https://ada.org/newdentistnews) to read more in-depth stories, news and insight about new dentists and their experiences. ■



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