



new dentist news



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Rise in stress-related oral health conditions

Maintaining wellness DURING A PANDEMIC

BY JENNIFER GARVIN

Living through a once in a century pandemic can take a toll.

Whether it's worries about getting sick or watching a loved one fall ill, to losing one's sense of routine and social connections, people everywhere are stressed out and scared. Dentists are no exception.

In an Aug. 24 ADA Health Policy Institute poll, more than half of the 4,000 dentist respondents reported experiencing personal challenges with anxiety, financial problems, sleep quality, weight change and/or depression during COVID-19.

"My friends and I have talked about this in depth," said Dr. Lindsay Compton, a new dentist and practice owner in Arvada, Colorado. "We feel a loss of connection with our dental peers. Attending in-person continuing education and social events through state and local dental societies charges our batteries and gives us a sense of community."

"We also feel a great amount of stress from our patients," she continued. "As dentists, we are seen as leaders and many of them look to us for answers. Our patients come in with their own hypothesis and the current issues are more polarizing than ever. People are at extremes and we are often the dumping ground for their thoughts. We also have sacrificed physical wellness,

Continued on Page 4.



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PRIORITIZING PASSION PROJECTS TO battle burnout

BY MARY BETH VERSACI

For Dr. Erinne Kennedy, part of avoiding burnout has been learning to say no.

In dental school, the self-described “go-getter” found herself divided among multiple commitments, wondering if she was making as much of an impact as she could be. She decided to cut back on her involvement to focus on a core of activities that truly ignited her passion.

“For me, I have started saying yes to career projects that bring me joy,” said Dr. Kennedy, who earned her dental degree and a master’s degree in public health from Nova Southeastern University in 2015 and a master’s degree of medical sciences in dental education from Harvard University in 2019. “Specifically, teaching dental public health is something that I love, and I am doing more of. Second, I learned to develop healthy habits by observing my most successful mentors, who had a community outside their career and hobbies that not only brought them joy but ones that they prioritized regularly.”

A study published in June 2017 in the Journal of Patient Safety found younger dentists, aged

34–44 years old, had higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than more seasoned dentists, aged 65–85 years old, said Dr. Kennedy, adding the prevalence of burnout among younger dentists could be because of a variety of challenges, including practicing at multiple offices as associates.

Dr. Kennedy, who is the director of predoctoral education at the Kansas City University College of Dental Medicine, has spoken about burnout and work-life balance as an ADA Success speaker, on the ADA’s Beyond the Mouth podcast and with student groups such as igniteDDS and the American Student Dental Association.

She encourages new dentists to battle burnout by finding mentors who help build resilience in them and doing what they love.

“Research shows that when health care professionals spend more than 20% of their time on their most meaningful career-related activity, they are at less risk for becoming burned

out,” Dr. Kennedy said. “I hope you take a few moments to reflect on how you can do more of what you love every day.”

For additional resources, visit [ADA.org/wellness](https://ada.org/wellness). ■



Dr. Kennedy

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Maintaining wellness

DURING A PANDEMIC

(continued from cover)



The great outdoors: Dr. Joe Vaughn and his wife, Dr. Rita Mackert, pose after tackling Mt. Rainier in Ashford, Washington.

fitness classes and gyms, to avoid contracting the virus or to save money. We miss our dopamine from physical exertion.”

To get some of that “feel-good” chemical, Dr. Compton has turned to one of her passions: being outdoors.

“This summer I wanted to climb more 14,000-foot mountains,” she said. “We call them 14ers in Colorado. I did a hard one in July and loved how I felt, and it gave me something to talk to my patients about besides what the news is reporting and the weather.”

The outdoors has also served as a balm for Dr. Joe Vaughn, an associate and public health dentist in Seattle.

“For my wife and I, it was a newfound passion in day hiking during the COVID-19 shutdown, and there’s plenty of that to go around in the beautiful state of Washington,” he said. “We’re also big fans of neighborhood [outdoor] happy hours as well as something as simple as going out for a drink with our friends.”

Another issue dentists may be facing is burnout. People who were experiencing mental, physical or emotional burden even before the virus hit, may be even more drained now.

“The first thing I focus on is the fact that I’m not alone,” Dr. Vaughn said. “I think the thing that’s truly special about dentistry and organized dentistry, in particular, is that it’s made up of a very supportive network of people who really want to see each other succeed.”

Dr. Compton recommended creating boundaries between work and off time, including setting limits for social media or any type of engagement that drains or uplifts. For her, that means looking for inspiration outside of work.

“I love dentistry, but it can be obsessive,” she added. “If I want to avoid burnout but still be connected, I choose one solitary procedure and focus on this until I exhaust myself. The beauty of dentistry is that we can get overwhelmed by the information and the variety. Focus on one thing and achieve excellence.”

Dr. Vaughn urges his fellow dentists not to bury the negative feelings when they come.

“In the moments when I’m feeling particularly unsuccessful and the doubt starts to creep in, the first thing I do is lean on my wife and my friends and my colleagues for support and camaraderie,” he said. “If I keep them all inside, it ends up taking

quite the toll on my mental wellness. I believe in using your support system, and I consider that ability to reach out as a true strength in our careers.”

“We need to learn to tune out all that noise and just focus on ourselves and write our own stories.”

Challenges like never before

Dr. Vaughn believes new dentists today are facing challenges that no other generation has had to face.

“Not only do we find ourselves with the highest student debt in history, working in the most competitive environment in history, but we are also able to see what every dentist in the country is doing right this very second.”

He advised to limit social media during these times.

“I don’t think we realize how mentally taxing it can be to see nothing but success and awesomeness and high-profile dentistry on Instagram and then wonder what you’re doing wrong and why you aren’t having that same experience,” he said. “There are so much noise out there these days. There are so many people trying to write your own personal story, tell you how you should be leading your career, and that leads to a lot of stress, anxiety and doubt that this is even the right profession for you. We need to learn to tune out all that noise and just focus on ourselves and write our own stories.”

The ADA offers tips for dentists on wellness. Visit [ADA.org/wellness](https://www.ada.org/wellness) to access all the Association’s resources.

There is also the ADA webinar, “Emotional Impact — Dealing Constructively with Stress in the Midst of COVID-19,” which features three dentists from the ADA’s Dentist Wellness Advisory Committee who talk about the emotions surrounding the most common fears and stressors dentists have reported experiencing before, during and after reopening their practices.

Visit [ADA.org/virus](https://www.ada.org/virus) and look under the “Mental Health” tab for this webinar and all ADA resources. ■



ideas to STAYING HEALTHY

While the health of patients is paramount, it is also important for dentists to stay healthy, whether it be physical, mental or emotional. The New Dentist News asked new dentists how they have been able to stay healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Eddie Ramirez: As an amateur body builder, exercising has been my key to a healthy lifestyle. I strive to stay active without direct access to a gym. Let's just say gallons of water can make good dumbbells.

Dr. Robin Nguyen: I have found an appreciation for cooking therapy — more specifically farm-to-table philosophy. We have started a small herb garden with the kids and have tried incorporating as much of our homegrown ingredients as possible.

Dr. Britt Marsh: I have spent more time with my wife, kids and extended family, especially outdoors. I have also been working towards my fellowship in the Academy of General Dentistry so I have been trying to devote more time to studying for the fellowship exam.

Dr. Amir Kazim: I chose to revisit a former passion of mine: cooking. I opted to go on a variety of culinary adventures with my wife. From Canadian poutine, Trinidadian pelau to Persian gormeh sabzi and all points in between, cooking allowed me to maintain mental sanity while making something delicious and nutritious.

Dr. Tanya Sue Maestas: One thing I've done to maintain/improve my health during the pandemic is find time to do yoga and meditation throughout the week. It helps me unwind, escape and feel rejuvenated especially after a long week. ■

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Ask the Expert:

HOW CAN I MAINTAIN FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF MY PRACTICE DURING TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY?

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

Dear Christine: Like many of my dental colleagues, I have been feeling the financial impact of COVID-19. We are experiencing a steady decline in patient bookings. I am working to balance my book of business to make up for the operational and enclosure costs that were required to meet the new regulatory criteria. Do you have any thoughts on how I may maintain financial wellness and stability during this time?

— Wellness Matters

Dear Wellness Matters: Dentists must now find ways to reduce operational costs in order to balance their book of business. It's a difficult and daunting task that can easily take a toll on your financial and physical wellness. Here are a few considerations:

- Try to reduce weekly costs. For example, cancel unused subscriptions or switch to lower plans for services. Renegotiate with your suppliers to lower payments or arrange longer payment terms for a period of time. They will want to keep you as a customer in the long run and may be flexible about deferring or accepting reduced payments.
 - Fixed assets are usually the more expensive items you've purchased to run your business and typically last more than one year. Think about taking the opportunity to streamline and sell anything you no longer need. Common examples to convert to cash include assessing excess technology, machinery and furniture.
 - Don't forget to communicate with your patients clearly and often. Let patients know what's changed in terms of expected service, any safety measures you've implemented, and how to reach you. Leverage outbound calls as well as social media as main channels of communication. This may help offset some of the fear your patients may be experiencing.
- An extended period of crisis creates a new set of stresses and makes it even more important that you prioritize your mental and emotional well-being. Don't shy away from reaching out to peers to find out their tips and tricks for coping with stress. Talk to friends and family as well. Many of them are facing similar challenges as you. ■

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.

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 for more information.

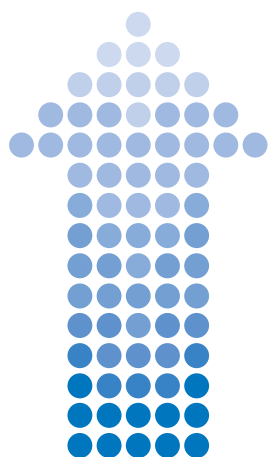
Rise in stress-related ORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

A majority of participating dentists have seen a rise in stress-related oral health conditions in their patients since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data from the ADA Health Policy Institute's COVID-19 impact poll for the week of Sept. 21.

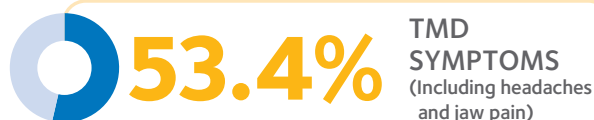
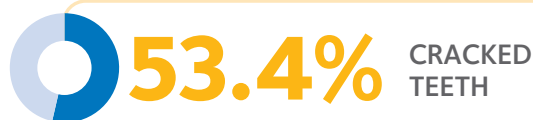
More than half of the dentists polled reported increases in the prevalence of bruxism (59.4%), chipped and cracked teeth (53.4%), and temporomandibular disorder symptoms (53.4%), and more than a quarter saw a rise in other conditions, including 26.4% who reported an increase in caries and 29.7% who reported an increase in periodontal disease.

For more results from HPI's COVID-19 Economic Impact on Dental Practice poll, visit ADA.org/HPI. ■

DENTISTS SEE MORE STRESS-RELATED CONDITIONS DURING PANDEMIC



DENTISTS CITING INCREASED PREVALENCE



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

In case you missed it



Perfect fit for me

Dr. Jessica Sikora, a new dentist in Maine, shares her experience finding the ideal associateship through the ADA Practice Transitions, or ADAPT, a service offered by the ADA that makes the process of entering or leaving a dental practice more predictable and successful. Visit ADA.org/perfectfit to read the article.

Visit ADA.org/newdentistnews to read more in-depth stories, news and insight about new dentists and their experiences. ■



ADA 10 Under 10 Awards nominations sought

The ADA is seeking nominations through Dec. 31 to recognize 10 new dentists who are demonstrating excellence in their work and inspiring others. Winners of the annual award receive a \$1,000 gift card and will be recognized in various ADA publications and channels. Visit ADA.org/10under10 for more information.



Getting to Know You: Dr. Michelle Aguilos Thompson

Dr. Thompson, a general dentist and assistant professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Dentistry at Houston, shares why "right now" is the best time of her career and how the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the reason she's involved in organized dentistry. Visit ADA.org/DrThompson to read the article.



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