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TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS VIRGINIA'S DENTAL WORKFORCE NEEDS

Ryan Dunn, CEO

Everyone in a dental office team plays a role in providing our communities with essential dental care. When I joined the Virginia Dental Association in 2019, two of the twenty careers projected to grow fastest in Virginia were dental assistants and dental hygienists. The growing workforce demand from dentistry predates the pandemic. Today's hiring challenges aren't unique to dentistry. Also, we can't expect anyone else to come up with short and long-term solutions. Before we get to that, let's start with a few facts.

FACT - Virginia has more dentists than the national average, and our population of licensed dentists is growing faster than our overall population.

We had 5,857 dentists in our workforce in 2021, about 550 more dentists than we had 8 years ago. That's 68 dentists per 100,000 people, compared to an average of 61 dentists per 100,000 people in the U.S.

FACT - It's harder to find a dentist in rural areas than in the urban crescent.

We have about twice as many dentists per 100,000 people in Northern Virginia as we do in Southwest Virginia. If you have to drive 30 miles to see a dentist, it doesn't matter much to you what our state average is. We have a distribution issue and need to find ways to make it easier for dentists to practice in areas of need. That includes recruiting dental students from those areas.

FACT - Enrollment is up at Virginia's Community College dental programs.

Of the programs run through the Virginia Community College System, there's been a 20 percent increase in enrollment for hygienists and assistants in the last 3

years from 480 to 578. That's better than the national average which dipped during the pandemic and has only recently recovered.

FACT - Dental offices are still struggling with hiring.

There are currently 550 listings on the VDA's Career Center, which launched this June, most of those for staff members. The October ADA Health Policy Institute report found nearly a third of dentists surveyed couldn't see a full patient load because of staffing issues.

Addressing Virginia's dental workforce needs is up to us. Here are four ways you can make a difference.

1. **Stay informed through the VDA.** Our president, Dr. Cindy Southern, is focused on dental workforce needs. We regularly share opportunities to serve on workforce leadership boards for the state and make recommendations for appointees to the Governor's office. The VDA is a G3 Program Ambassador partnering with our community college system to promote those in-demand careers. We are the only group representing our members' interests when it comes to licensure issues that could affect you and your team. You are already reading the Virginia Dental Journal – watch for our regular e-Digest newsletters and other communications for the latest news and opportunities to help. You can also sign up for text alerts by texting "VDA" to 52886.
2. **Call your local community college dental program to see how you can help.** CODA requires strict

student to faculty ratios for accredited dental hygiene and dental assisting programs. The VDA has joined other state dental associations in lobbying for flexibility around those ratios. But in the meantime, finding and retaining qualified faculty continues to be a challenge for nearly every dental program in the state. If you're able to donate your time as an adjunct faculty member, hosting students for clinic hours, or donating extra dental supplies to a local program, you can make a difference in allowing them to train students who are seeking a career working in dental practices. There's a listing of those programs on page 25 in the Journal.

3. **Make sure our VDA leadership and staff are armed with your stories.** If you face a challenge in licensure, credentialing, hiring or other aspects of your practice, please share it with a member of the VDA staff or leadership. We have regular meetings with members of the administration and legislative leaders on workforce issues. Conveying those personal stories from constituents to your representatives in the General Assembly and through the media can be one of the most impactful catalysts for change. If you're working on unique solutions in your community, want to talk to your local community college about starting a new program or have ideas to address challenges, share that too. There are many VDA members working on solutions. I want to particularly commend Dr. Emily Bowen, who shared her story about launching a new dental assisting program in this edition of the Journal,

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and Dr. Erika Anderson, who led a work group with the Northern Virginia Dental Society to recommend unique solutions to their regional workforce challenges.

make changes to address workforce challenges unless we show up and ask for them. Please register to join us at Dental Days. And if you've already registered, talk to a colleague about joining you.

4. **Get Involved.** We will be considering options to address workforce needs when the VDA House of Delegates meets at Dental Days at the Capitol this January. We will also be meeting with legislators to impress on them how dentists are being squeezed by rising costs, third party payers and other challenges, including hiring. Legislators won't be able to

We can all play a part in ensuring Virginia has the oral healthcare workforce it needs. Just by being a part of organized dentistry, you are already doing more than some. If you have the ability to do so, I ask you to consider taking additional steps through the VDA to support existing dental programs and to set us on a long-term path to meeting the needs in communities across Virginia.

Your practice is one of your most important assets. DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S WORTH?

While no one likes to think about it, things do happen and it's always important to be prepared.

Knowing your practice's value can make the difference between selling your practice or having it become unsellable. That is why practice owners should have an up-to-date practice valuation.

A **Henry Schein Dental Practice Transitions** valuation considers both tangible and intangible assets of the practice and can provide the many key factors which influence the practice's value.



Contact us today to schedule a complimentary, confidential consultation!

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