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My Pillars for Success: Education, Unity and Community

SUSAN KUTIS, DDS



Greetings MDDS members and colleagues. I am humbled and excited to be your new president. My name is Susan Kutis and I am a general dentist and a private practice owner in Littleton, Colorado. I began my dental journey as a dental assistant in 2001 for Manus Northwestern in Chicago, which at the time was the Northwestern Dental School Faculty Practice. I had taken a gap year between my

undergraduate at Loyola University and dental school. This gap year was incredibly formative for me. Manus Northwestern was the premier dental group practice, where cosmetic dentistry was not just talked about but done at the highest level. Willi Geller, the world-renowned master ceramist from Switzerland would hang out with our prosthodontist to discuss the latest techniques in layered ceramics and another practitioner was the Chicago Dental Society President and the president of the AACD. It was through this experience I was first exposed to the importance of organized dentistry. They knew I was interested in dentistry as a profession and were willing to invest time and energy in me. I was overwhelmed with gratitude because, I was an immigrant kid, whose parents were very loving and supportive but truly had no way to guide me through this process. These men and women were leaders in the field and willing to take me under their wings. I was a bright-eyed new college graduate interested in dentistry and wanted to take it all in. Through this experience, I met lifelong dental mentors, friends and colleagues.

I went on to receive my dental degree from the University of Illinois and completed a general practice residency at the University of Colorado. After completing my GPR, I was asked to become the Director and Assistant Professor at the CU School of Dental Medicine. While I loved teaching, I always wanted to go into private practice. The challenge was I was saddled with student loan debt and was a full-time, single parent. Therefore, I left the education sector and spent several years as an associate dentist in private and corporate practices. Finally, in 2016, a decade after graduating from dental school, I felt financially and emotionally ready to open my dental practice.

Throughout the twists and turns of my professional career, each setback and each opportunity allowed me to formulate three pillars that have permeated my career for the last twenty years.

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First, invest in yourself by taking quality continuing education. Early on, I realized dentistry is a dynamic profession and to be truly exceptional at what we do we must seek out guidance from the best dental leaders and educators. I had the opportunity to be a student and then an educator with the Pacific Esthetic Continuum. Taking courses from incredible educators such as Dr. Pete Dawson and Dr. Frank Spear have forever changed how I practice dentistry. The Rocky Mountain Dental Convention (RMDC) has always been a convenient and relevant platform for such education. One of my goals is to make the 2025 RMDC one of the best conventions for education content and participant engagement.

The second pillar is the importance and power of organized dentistry. For me, MDDS is an organization of inclusion and a space that brings clinicians together to take on the challenges our profession faces collectively. While there are many unique practice modalities and individual dental journeys there are common issues we all face, including student loan debt and/or workforce challenges. Through the various arms of organized dentistry, we can take on the dysfunction of third-party payers and lobby as a unified force against policy and legislation aimed at devaluing what we do and how we provide care. The bottom line is a unified voice gets amplified and has a greater impact on legislative policies.

The last pillar is mentorship and the benefits of camaraderie. If you study the Blue Zones, places with the longest life expectancies, a common thread is a sense of community and belonging. MDDS has provided me with this sense of belonging and community. I am so blessed to have a network of dear friends and colleagues who have supported me during life's most challenging times

and are also there to celebrate the small wins. I have met lifelong friends by participating in the various social events MDDS has hosted. Just this weekend I participated in the Trails & Ales Hike where I met a female orthodontist. While she was relatively new to Denver, we discovered she graduated from Northwestern Dental School, and we knew all the same clinicians I assisted years ago at Manus. Life suddenly felt so much more interconnected and meaningful. It is encounters such as these which make me appreciate the benefits of MDDS even more.

Another awareness I discovered by serving on the MDDS board for the past four years is the strength of diversity. I am proud to say we are the most diverse board I have had the privilege to be part of. We have a wide range of practice modalities (i.e. private practice, DSO model, dental educators and public health clinic providers). Our age range is from late twenties to late seventies.

We consist of varied backgrounds and genders plus new graduates, new moms, new to retirement and seasoned multi-practice owners. All this diversity brings a difference of perspective and a new lens to view complex challenges. It is a safe place to have a difference of opinion and fosters inclusion and respect. This diversity makes us stronger in the type of programming we put on and how we tackle and remain relevant in an ever-changing dental landscape.

I look forward to serving you this year.

SUSAN KUTIS, DDS
PRESIDENT, MDDS



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