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Headquarters Report: Without MDA Advocacy, Michigan Dentistry Would Look Very Different

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By Karen Burgess, MBA, CAE
MDA CEO/Executive Director

Without MDA Advocacy, Michigan Dentistry Would Look Very Different

Editor's Note: This report is adapted from Karen Burgess' remarks to the MDA House of Delegates, presented on April 28, 2022.

The last three years have been a somewhat surreal experience. While we are not out of the woods yet with COVID-19, I think that organized dentistry has come back, stronger than ever. Our membership is strong, our finances are strong, and our leadership is strong and forward-focused.

The dental profession here in Michigan has made a good comeback as well, although we are not yet at 100%. Your MDA has been working hard to provide members with practical resources to help you care for your patients and achieve practice success.

Perhaps even more critical is MDA advocacy on behalf of the dental profession and the public we serve. I was looking back over our advocacy initiatives since the time I've been executive director, and I realized something: Without MDA advocacy, dentistry in Michigan could look very different.

Let's take a look at that world.

First, COVID-19's impact on dentistry would have been huge. Dental practices would not have opened when other essential health care services did, and the rules and regulations for re-opening would have been very impractical. MDA advocacy made a difference.

Dentists and dental team members would have had a lower priority for COVID-19 vaccination. With MDA advocacy, dentistry was in Priority Group 1A.

Dentists would not have received any PPE through donations. Instead, the MDA, ADA, and local dental societies helped Michigan dentists access masks, face shields, and other PPE.

There would have been mass confusion in Michigan dentistry! But the MDA cut through the confusion and kept dentists up-to-date on the latest requirements.

Second, there would be additional, harmful regulations. Dentists would still be paying thousands of dollars for consulting help to get through the bureaucratic Certificate of Need Process to buy a dental CT. MDA advocacy was critical in getting dentists an exemption.

Dentists also would still be paying thousands of dollars each and every year in sales tax on dental prosthetics. The MDA got that tax eliminated. And, dentists not only didn't have to pay, they got money back.

OJT dental assistants would no longer be able to take radiographs unless they were licensed to do so, and dentists and dental team members would not be allowed to use handheld X-rays. The MDA stopped that bill.

Dentists would have to comply with onerous administrative requirements that don't really relate to dentistry, due to Michigan's surprise billing law. The MDA got dentistry exempted.

Third, critical regulations to protect the public wouldn't exist. More Michigan communities would be without community water fluoridation. MDA grassroots advocacy fought for community water fluoridation all across the state — and won.

Mobile dental operations would not be required to follow the same rules as regular dental offices. But the MDA got a law passed making sure they do.

Hygienists would have prescription-writing authority independent of dentists. The MDA stopped these efforts.

Dental therapists — if and when we get some in Michigan — would have had less training, less supervision, and the ability to do more-invasive procedures. The MDA tightened up the regulations to ensure future patient safety.

Fourth, there would be fewer dollars for dentistry. Healthy Kids Dental and the Michigan Donated Dental Services (DDS) program would not be fully funded in the state of Michigan budget. With MDA advocacy, funding has remained strong, and we are even looking at expansion of the successful Healthy Kids model to adults with the 2023 budget.

Dentists would not be able to bill for nitrous oxide analgesia under Healthy Kids. But the MDA successfully advocated to preserve this fee.

Finally — there would be no voice for dentistry on some key dental issues. For example, dental students and new dentists would have conflicting and confusing information on managing student debt. The ADA tells us that the class of 2021 graduated with an average of \$300,000 in debt. The MDA curates correct up-to-date info on the new Student Debt Resource Center at michigandental.org.

Specialists could not claim their specialty. MDA-supported legislation passed that recognized five new specialties in our state: oral medicine, orofacial pain, dental public health, dental radiology, and dental anesthesiology. The MDA will continue to monitor and seek legislation if new specialties are recognized at the national level.

Dental insurance companies would continue to cause

confusion and frustration for dentists and patients by leasing their networks to other insurance companies. The MDA is now working with legislators to bring forward a law to require transparency in network leasing.

Vulnerable Michiganders would continue to have little access to dental care in hospital and ambulatory care surgical centers due to low reimbursement rates to the facilities and anesthesia providers. The MDA currently is advocating for Medicaid reimbursement increases to solve the problem.

Teledentistry would be the wild west, with few regulations to ensure patient safety and maintain the appropriate standard of care. The MDA is advocating for legislation and regulations that enhance access to care safely and fairly.

The 2023 state of Michigan budget might not include increased funding for dentistry and dental Medicaid – critical dollars for enhancing access to care and fair reimbursement for services provided.

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There's no doubt that a Michigan without the MDA would be a very different place. Our advocacy initiatives make a real difference, every day, for dentists and for patients.

As I reflect back on the last few years, I'm grateful to our MDA Board of Trustees, our Committee on Governmental and Insurance Affairs, our advocacy staff and lobbyists, our components that schedule legislative events, and especially to members who take the time to respond to Phone2Action alerts, attend in-district meetings, meet by Zoom with legislators and stakeholders, and contribute to MDA Dental PAC.

Thank you for all you do! ●

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