

best practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

MAY 2024

SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS:

Breaking down
barriers to good
oral health

CODING TIPS TO
SPEED UP YOUR
CLAIMS PROCESS

CE
MADE
EASY

IS VALUE-BASED
REIMBURSEMENT
THE FUTURE OF
HEALTH CARE?



Supporting access, excellence and success

Jeffery W. Johnston, DDS, MS

Editor | Diplomate, American Board of Periodontology
and Dental Implant Surgery | Senior Vice President of
Professional Services and Chief Science Officer

Delta Dental of Tennessee

The practice of dentistry has never been more promising.

People are finally becoming aware of the connection between oral and overall health. Providers are using new sophisticated technology to personalize care, reduce discomfort and improve outcomes. And the vast majority of Americans now have private or government dental insurance.

At the same time the business of dentistry has never been more vexing.

Whether you are trying to run a robust private dental practice or advocate for yourself and your patients in a dental service organization (DSO), the rapid pace of change, the cost of new technologies, inflation and staffing shortages keep a lot of us up at night.

To help you maximize opportunities and minimize risks and aggravations, in collaboration with Delta Dental of Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, Delta Dental of Tennessee is launching *Best Practice: Dentistry, Business and Policy*.

This publication, which will be mailed to you three times a year, and the digital content available between issues is designed to help you bridge the gap between dentistry and business so you can make a good living while also providing the best, most expansive care possible in your community.

Best Practice will offer concise, actionable content on the latest dental trends and research, emerging technologies, and business strategies to give you a competitive edge.

Helping you be more effective means making sure you are aware of the many resources and programs available to you as a Delta Dental provider, such as the rich selection of continuing education (CE) courses we offer at no cost to you.

It also means showing you how to get paid quickly and correctly by avoiding common mistakes made in coding and submitting claims.

Beyond the printed publication, we hope to build a community of dental professionals dedicated to our shared mission of increasing access to oral health care and building healthier communities one smile at a time.

This work is best done together. We welcome your comments and ideas. You may email us at BestPractice@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Thank you.

We appreciate you for being a part of Delta Dental's network and for being a force for good health in your communities.



We are passionate about our company's mission to increase access to oral health care, and we believe our more than 3,200 dentists in Tennessee are essential to fulfilling that purpose. We need your expertise, dedication and commitment to your patients, our members.

We know it's challenging.

It's hard to be a dentist and an entrepreneur. It's equally difficult to be an advocate for patients and an employee of a large dental service organization (DSO). It's taxing to do it all with chronic staffing shortages.

Welcome to the first issue of *Best Practice: Dentistry, Business and Policy*, created exclusively for Delta Dental participating dentists.

Jeff R Ballard | President and CEO
Delta Dental of Tennessee

As a former CFO, I understand how challenging it can be to run a business effectively and profitably. Our hope is that this timely, reader-friendly publication will make it a little easier for you to balance the many things you have to do to serve your patients, stay on top of your credentials and keep the lights on.

Dentists are our primary audience, but we hope you will share this resource with office managers, hygienists and others with whom you work. All our content will be reviewed by a team of dentists before publication.

Email us at BestPractice@DeltaDentalTN.com and let us know if you are interested in publishing articles, being a source of information, participating in a focus group or being part of an editorial advisory board to guide the content of Best Practice.

Thank you for being our partner.

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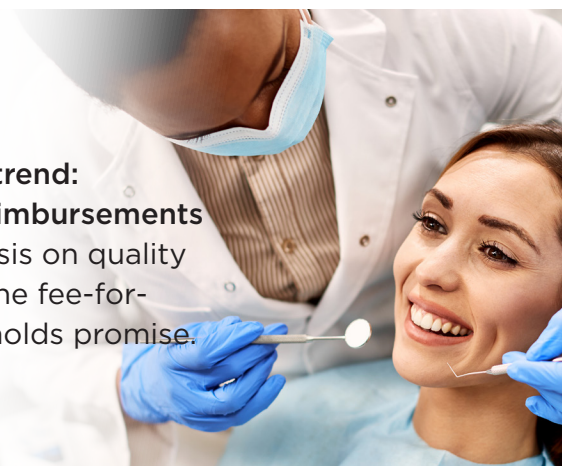
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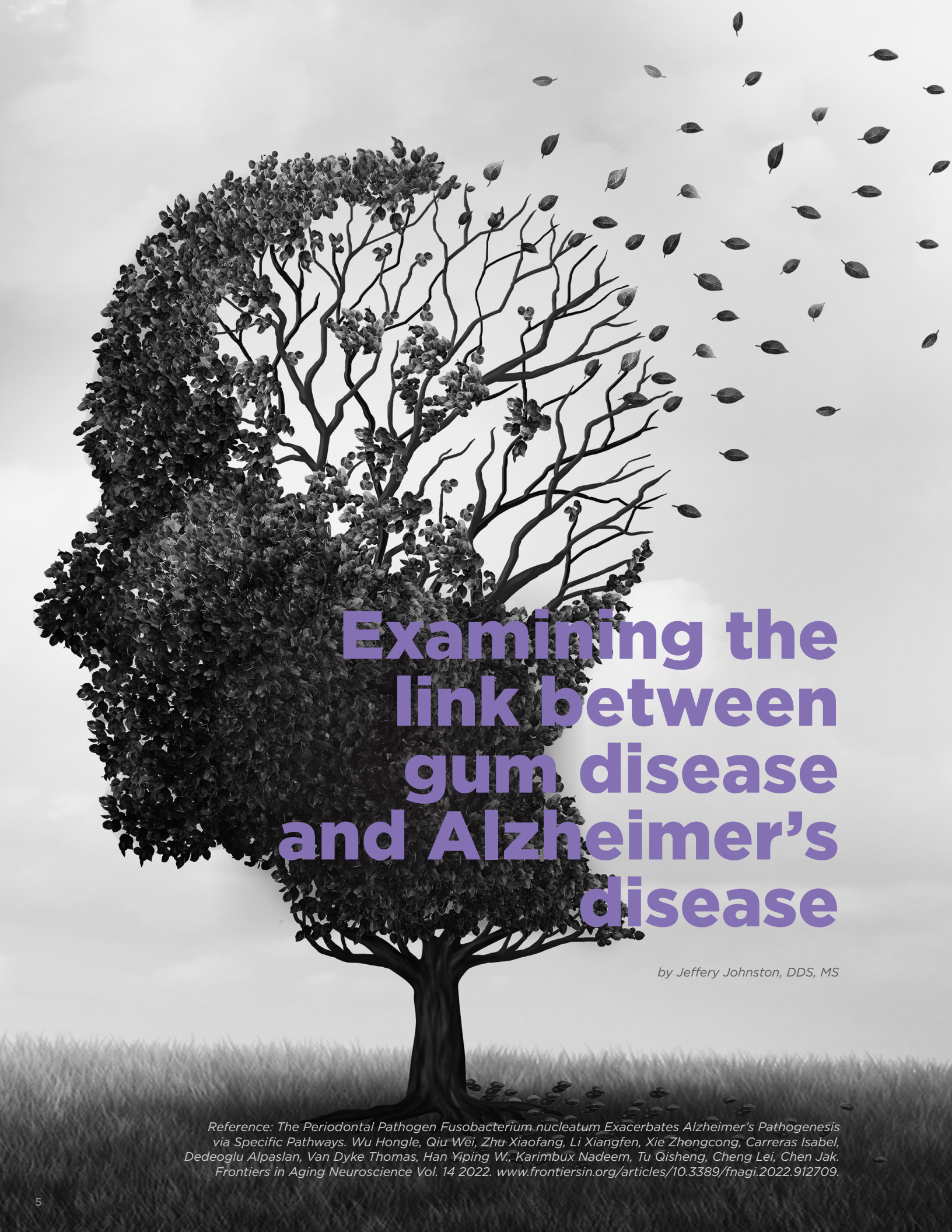


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With an emphasis on quality over quantity, the fee-for-service model holds promise.




To view citations and references noted throughout this publication, visit DeltaDentalTN.com/Best-Practice-Citations.



Examining the link between gum disease and Alzheimer's disease

by Jeffery Johnston, DDS, MS

*Reference: The Periodontal Pathogen *Fusobacterium nucleatum* Exacerbates Alzheimer's Pathogenesis via Specific Pathways. Wu Hongle, Qiu Wei, Zhu Xiaofang, Li Xiangfen, Xie Zhongcong, Carreras Isabel, Dedeoglu Alpaslan, Van Dyke Thomas, Han Yiping W., Karimbux Nadeem, Tu Qisheng, Cheng Lei, Chen Jak. Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience Vol. 14 2022. www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnagi.2022.912709.*



The connection between oral health and brain health just got a little stronger.

A recent publication in the journal *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience* by Tufts University has spurred much interest in Alzheimer's disease. The paper suggests a link between *Fusobacterium nucleatum* (*F. nucleatum*) and Alzheimer's disease. The relationship between gum disease and Alzheimer's disease has been studied for years; however, this latest paper suggests a different mechanism proposed by previous investigators.

In 1907, Dr. Alois Alzheimer, a German physician, first described the disorder as an idiopathic, irreversible, progressive neurological condition that slowly destroys memory, language and thinking skills. Small abnormalities called *amyloid plaques* and *tau tangles* in specific locations in the brain are pathognomonic for Alzheimer's disease. It is marked histologically by the degeneration of brain neurons in the cerebral cortex

and by the presence of *neurofibrillary plaques of beta-amyloid*. It is the most common cause of dementia in adults older than 65 and is among the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States.

Interest in the link between periodontitis and Alzheimer's disease is not new. In previous studies, researchers analyzed brain tissue, spinal fluid and saliva from Alzheimer's patients and found evidence of *P. gingivalis*. *Gingipains*, the toxic enzyme secreted by *P. gingivalis*, was found in 96 percent of the 53 brain tissue samples examined, with higher levels detected in those with Alzheimer's disease. *P. gingivalis* increased the production of beta-amyloid. Studies confirmed that *P. gingivalis* can travel from the oral cavity to the brain and that the related gingipains can destroy brain neurons. This suggests a biological mechanism for how putative periodontal bacteria may play a role in the development and progression of Alzheimer's disease.

A recent study involved mice and *Fusobacterium nucleatum*. *F. nucleatum*, a bacteria commonly found in gum disease,

generates systemic inflammatory mediators and infiltrates nervous system tissues to exacerbate the signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. *F. nucleatum* has also been linked to conditions such as colorectal cancer. *F. nucleatum* results in an abnormal proliferation of microglial cells, which are the immune cells in the brain that function to remove damaged neurons and infections to help maintain the overall health of the central nervous system.

This oversupply of microglial cells also creates an increased inflammatory response. Chronic inflammation is believed to be a key determinant in the cognitive decline that occurs as Alzheimer's disease progresses. *F. nucleatum* can reduce the memory and thinking skills in mice through certain signal pathways.

Although the study adds to the evidence supporting a link between periodontitis and Alzheimer's disease, additional research is needed to further understand the etiology of Alzheimer's disease and how periodontitis-related bacteria can exacerbate progression. The research also underscores the concept of oral health being related to systemic health and that oral health should be considered a component of overall health.

CE MAD

Your state requires you to complete continuing education courses. We make them convenient and relevant.

Delta Dental's online continuing education (CE) courses are offered at no cost to you through your state-specific website.

Any dentist, hygienist, dental assistant or office staff member who is a Delta Dental of Tennessee participating provider or works for a Delta Dental participating provider may take these courses.

"Our CE courses are developed for dental professionals by dental professionals," said Dr. Jeffery Johnston, senior vice president of professional services and chief science officer. "They provide a science-based response to what can seem like increasingly unwieldy government requirements."

These courses are available 24/7 to help you conveniently and cost-effectively comply with ongoing regulatory demands so you can quickly get back to what you would rather do—serve patients.

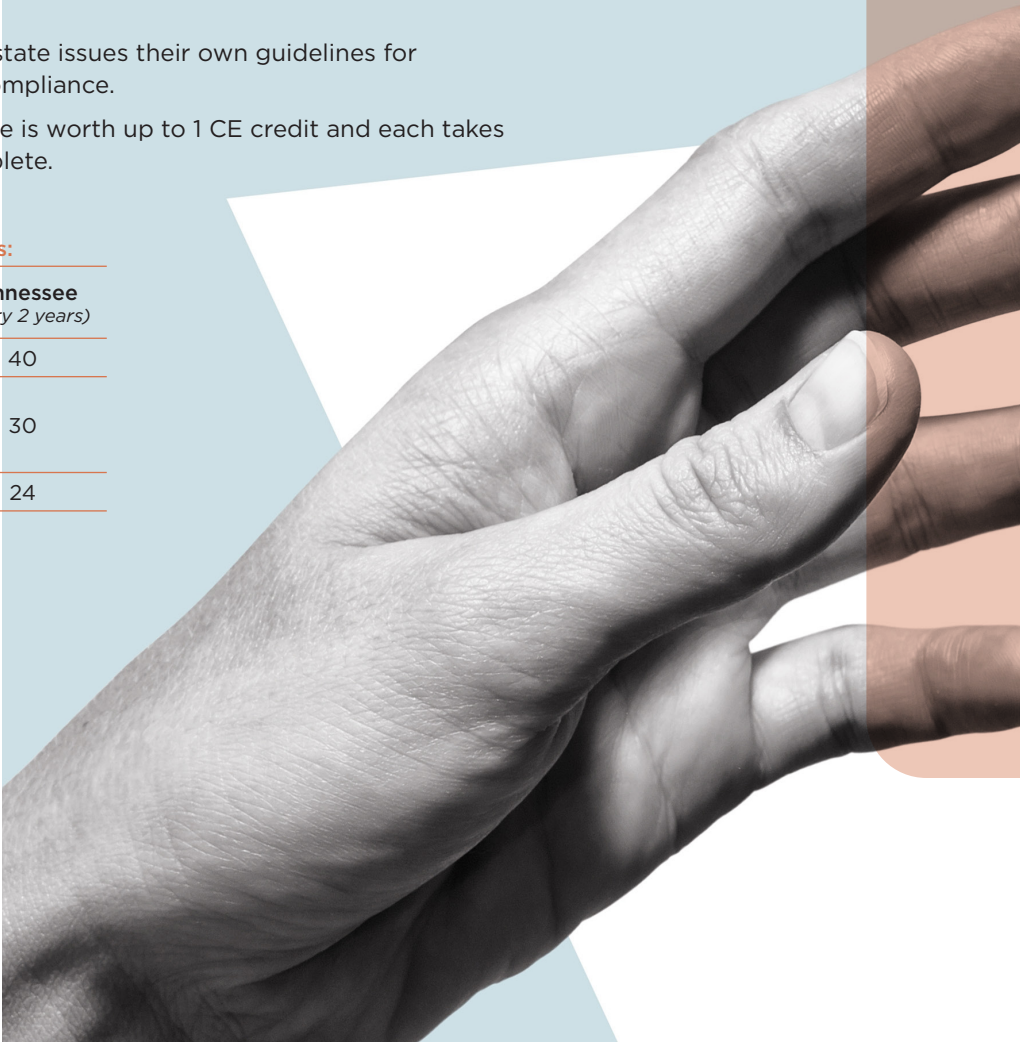
Courses include an informational video on each topic and an assessment. Complete them at your own pace. Upon completion, you will receive a certificate.

What's required? Each state issues their own guidelines for continuing education compliance.

Each Delta Dental course is worth up to 1 CE credit and each takes about one hour to complete.

Required CE hours:

	Tennessee (every 2 years)
Dentists	40
Hygienists (Half of hours must be in person)	30
Dental assistants	24



E E A S Y

COURSE OFFERINGS:

Dental Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs | This course covers general information about an oral health visit for infants and toddlers with special health care needs.

Ethics and Jurisprudence | Gain important knowledge about dental ethics, professional definitions (RDA, RDH, dental therapist, dentist, specialist), delegation, supervision, assignment, dental record requirements and jurisprudence. *(Though the content applies only to Michigan, those in Tennessee are invited to participate.)*

Fluoride | Learn about current concepts on the clinical use of fluorides.

How to Complete an Age 1 Dental Visit | Understand and review the importance of a dental visit at age 1. A technique will be introduced to help dentists complete the visit in an efficient and effective manner.

HPV and Head and Neck Cancer | Learn more about how changing lifestyle behaviors have changed the demographics and clinical presentations of oral squamous cell carcinoma.

Human Trafficking—Modern Day Slavery | This course discusses the scope of current issues surrounding human trafficking and how you can be more aware at your dental office.

Infant and Toddler Oral Health Care | Review general information about an oral health visit for infants and toddlers.

Infection Control | This course reviews the CDC guidelines on infection control in the dental office.

Nutrition for Health and Disease Prevention | Learn about nutrition for health and disease prevention, identify dietary patterns, specific foods and food components that have shown promise in health promotion.

Nutrition for Oral and Overall Health | Expand your nutritional oral health knowledge by reviewing nutrition and oral health interrelationships.

Opioids, The Opioid Epidemic, and Opioid Use Disorder | This course will introduce you to the opioid epidemic, opioid use disorder, medications for OUD (MOUD) and treating patients on MOUD.

Periodontal and Peri-Implant Diseases and Conditions | Gain insight on the proceedings from the American Academy of Periodontology world workshop, as well as the diagnostic classifications, staging and grading of the periodontal diseases.

Safe Opioid Prescribing Practices, New Laws and Regulations | This course is a general awareness training surrounding opioids and other controlled substances for prescribers.

The Proper Handling of Amalgam and its Wastes—Complying with the New EPA Rules | Review best practices and legal requirements for the handling and disposal of dental amalgam.

The Seal Is the Deal | Examine the current evidence-based thinking on sealants.



Scan this Q.R. code for access to available courses.

A DREAM TAKES ROOT

Dr. Christina Rosenthal, a dentist from Memphis, Tennessee, knows first-hand the effects of lack of oral health care. She never saw a dentist until the age of 13, even though she was an enrollee of TennCare. Fortuitously, her first dental visits were with African-American female dentists. Though maybe that was more than pure chance because she insists those same dentists not only taught her the benefits of taking care of her oral health but were instrumental in the career path she decided to take.

Coming from what she calls very humble beginnings in North Memphis, Dr. Rosenthal's quest to become a dentist wasn't easy. But, dentistry has allowed her to follow her dreams and afforded her the opportunity to help those coming after her do the same.

Continuing to see the discrepancy between diversity in her community and that within the dental profession, Dr. Rosenthal created Determined to be a Doctor Someday (D.D.S). It is a pathway program designed to expose students to the various disciplines of healthcare, and more importantly inspire hope.

During the six-month program, teens (age 14-18) and toddlers (age 2-5) participate in fun discipline-related activities that focus on a different healthcare field each month. In the end, students are rewarded with a white coat ceremony reception, as well as the belief that if they work hard, they can become a doctor someday too.

It's the same theme radiating in the children's book Dr. Rosenthal wrote, *You Can Become A Doctor Too*. It follows a boy named Art and his classmates who, before career day at school, believed becoming a doctor was impossible. After listening to the dentists, medical doctors, veterinarians, and more, his and his classmates' mindsets change. The book highlights the importance of exposure to healthcare career fields at a young age, as well as showing that adults who come from similar backgrounds made it, meaning so can they!

It's a full circle moment for Dr. Rosenthal.





Breaking barriers in dentistry

Minority dentists have championed oral health for more than 150 years. In fact, minority dentists are more likely to treat patients with Medicaid and those from underserved communities.¹ And yet, there is still work to be done to achieve racial equity in the dental profession. Take a look at the following numbers:

31.1% of American dentists identify as a minority

Delta Dental recognizes the importance of celebrating the achievements of minority dentists and supporting inclusion in dentistry. Last year, the Delta Dental Plans Association announced a \$1 million campaign to promote racial diversity in the dental workforce. In 2024, it will continue that industry-leading fund and invest another \$1 million in comprehensive solutions, innovative pilots, and scalable models that inspire school-aged children from historically underrepresented groups to pursue careers in oral health.

Research shows that racial and ethnic diversity among health professionals is linked to improved patient outcomes, but the current oral health workforce does not accurately represent the diversity of the communities they serve. Delta Dental's Oral Health Diversity Fund aims to increase the number of oral health professionals from historically underrepresented groups and support programs that help diversify the oral health workforce through education, research, and community engagement.

The Oral Health Diversity Fund will be accepting applications from those programs from March 20 to May 31, 2025 at 5 p.m. ET. Eligible applicants must be based in the United States, and may include 501(c)(3) organizations, private businesses, or limited or general partnerships. Those interested in applying can visit www.DeltaDentalInstitute.com/Fund.

New Delta Dental Groups

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes the following new groups. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Restoration International Outreach	Alcoa	Joe Neubert Collision Centers	Knoxville
Athens Insurance	Athens	Heelex, LLC	Knoxville
Trinity Grace Church	Athens	Knoxville Chamber	Knoxville
Rhodes Electric, Inc.	Atoka	Frantz, McConnell & Seymour	Knoxville
R-Dent Dental Laboratory	Bartlett	Cannon and Cannon, Inc.	Knoxville
Odyssey Medical Technologies, LLC	Bartlett	Saddlebrook Properties	Knoxville
Delek US Holdings, Inc.	Brentwood	Radphys Oncology	Knoxville
Nashville Coin Gallery, LLC	Brentwood	American Home Improvements, LLC	Knoxville
LP3 Solutions, LLC	Brentwood	360 Solutions, LLC	Knoxville
River Associates Investments, LP	Chattanooga	LYP Contact Center, LLC	Knoxville
Integrated Networking Technologies	Chattanooga	Trinity Restoration	Knoxville
Ridenour & Ridenour		Road Worx, Inc.	Knoxville
Attorneys at Law	Clinton	elliTek, Inc.	Knoxville
Tuscan Iron Entries, Inc.	Collierville	Garage Door Solutions of TN, LLC	Knoxville
Classic Tile & Marble Co., Inc.	Collierville	GCE Construction	La Follette
Phoenix USA, Inc.	Cookeville	Ingram Entertainment, Inc.	La Vergne
Adult Primary Care of Memphis P.C.	Cordova	MBM Heating and Air	Lancing
Easley Delones Family Medicine	Covington	Mission Transport	Loudon
Highland Federal Savings and Loan	Crossville	S3 Perspectives	Maryville
Alberty Resources, LLC	Dandridge	Vermillion Law PLLC	Maryville
City Enterprises, LLC	Franklin	Exedy America Corporation	Mascot
Breymont Group	Franklin	Union County Public Schools	Maynardville
Griffith Law, PLLC	Franklin	International Paper Company	Memphis
Franklin Sign Co.	Franklin	ComCap Partners/Community Capital, LLC	Memphis
National Wheel	Friendsville	House of the Good Shepherd of Memphis dba DeNeuville	
M&E Excavation and Tree Service, Inc.	Georgetown	Learning Center for Women	Memphis
McNeill Hotel Company, LLC	Germantown	Plough Towers - Memphis Jewish Housing	Memphis
TN Voices	Goodlettsville	Mascom Communications	Memphis
Franklin Underground Construction	Greeneville	Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering	Memphis
Broyles Feed Store, Inc.	Greeneville	Southern Sun Asset Management	Memphis
Town of Halls	Halls	MNB Architecture	Memphis
Frozen Pizza Creative	Hendersonville	ESO Management Services	Memphis
New Day Christian Distributors	Hendersonville	Hope Primary Care, PLLC	Memphis
ABIDE Counseling	Hermitage	Swaffer and Associates Insurance Agency	Memphis
Jackson-Madison County General Hospital District (West Tennessee Healthcare)	Jackson	Trust Marketing	Memphis
Forever Communications	Jackson	Hope Primary Care	Millington
The Ceramic Tile Warehouse	Jackson	Rush Electric	Millington
City of Johnson City Government	Johnson City	Morristown Utilities Commission	Morristown
First Christian Church of Johnson City	Johnson City	Hamblen County Substance Abuse Coalition	Morristown
Beacon Group, LLC	Johnson City	Abundance Wellness Center, LLC	Morristown
Valley Equipment Company, Inc.	Johnson City	Proctor and Graves Service Company	Mount Juliet
Appalachian Environmental Resources, Inc.	Johnson City	Flow Service Partners	Mount Juliet
Assured Insurance Consultants, LLC	Johnson City	RMC Pharma, Inc.	Munford
Ministry Brands Holdings, LLC	Knoxville	Rudd Medical Services	Murfreesboro
Etsell, Inc.	Knoxville	Civil Infrastructure Associates, LLC	Murfreesboro
Sevier Heights Baptist Church	Knoxville	Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority	Nashville
McCarty Holsaple McCarty Architects, Inc.	Knoxville	RevSpring, Inc.	Nashville
Johnson Architecture, Inc.	Knoxville		

Goodwill Industries of Middle Tennessee, Inc.	Nashville
West End United Methodist Church	Nashville
TCW Admin, Inc.	Nashville
Better Collective	Nashville
Davidson Academy	Nashville
Centertel Management Group, Inc.	Nashville
Francis Communications, Inc.	Nashville
Academy of Country Music	Nashville
United South & Eastern Tribes, Inc.	Nashville
Criterion Capital Advisors, LLC	Nashville
Turf Managers, LLC	Nashville
Profit Drivers, LLC	Nashville
Ascent Property Management, LLC	Nashville
Average Joes Entertainment Group, LLC	Nashville
Bridges for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Nashville
Total Property Management Services Group, LLC	New Market
Eastern Plating, LLC	Newport
J & Company Auto Repair, LLC	Nolensville
Oral Surgery Specialists of Tennessee	Oak Ridge

Sexton, Sexton & Leach, PC
 Shoals Technologies Group, LLC
 Connell Body Shop
 Hickman & Associates
 Tree Tops Real Estate, Inc.
 Ms. Nichole's, Inc.
 City of Soddy Daisy
 Hurricane Creek Mining, LLC
 Sungwoo HiTech America Corp.
 AE Reynolds Insurance Agency
 White House Health Care, Inc.
 Wilson Well Company, Inc.
 S2L Recovery

Oneida
 Portland
 Ripley
 Sevierville
 Sevierville
 Smyrna
 Soddy Daisy
 Tazewell
 Telford
 Tennessee Ridge
 White House
 Whiteville
 Woodbury

New Delta Dental Providers

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes our new and returning contracted providers. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Brandon Jones	Brentwood
Sydney Larsen	Brentwood
Nicholas Miller	Brentwood
Olivia Sacopulos	Brentwood
James Darby	Bristol
Payton Lane	Chattanooga
David Rittenhouse	Chattanooga
Martha Nicholson	Clarksville
Eric Smorch	Clarksville
Rachel Stein	Clarksville
Kelli Gutter	Collierville
Clarence Austin Hogan	Cookeville
Samuel Loyd	Cookeville
Kameswarasatya Upadhyayula	Cookeville
Kamberly Tate	Crossville
Juliana Fitzgerald	Dandridge
Suhyun Rue	Dickson
Sherry Gates	Germantown
Kanwal Maheshwari	Goodlettsville
Al Dahan Mais	Hendersonville
Krishna Patel	Hendersonville
Christian Brown	Hermitage
Priscilla Costa	Hohenwald
Sydney Katras	Kingsport
Mandy Olson	Kingsport
Gary Boling	Knoxville
Theandrew Clayborn	Knoxville
Holton Deatherage	Knoxville

Quang Huynh
 Regan McNerney
 Laura Yunatan Klein
 Allyson Fesmire
 Preston Harris
 Monica Ginart
 Olga Byakina
 Angela Davis
 Hillary Gore
 Albert Gruber
 Scott Jackson
 Abby Raymond
 Amit Unnadkat
 Hannah Stone
 Michael Strait
 Rhyann Townes
 David Ellis
 Kristle Hill Ferguson
 Milad Owji
 Christopher Rohe
 Binita Satpathy
 Katelyn White
 Jeremiah Holt
 Racquel Johnson
 Frederic Dunn
 Jaja Bakari
 John Wilson
 Savannah Day

Knoxville
 Knoxville
 Knoxville
 Madison
 Madison
 Maryville
 Memphis
 Memphis
 Memphis
 Memphis
 Memphis
 Memphis
 Murfreesboro
 Murfreesboro
 Murfreesboro
 Nashville
 Nashville
 Nashville
 Nashville
 Nashville
 Nashville
 Ooltewah
 Pleasant View
 Shelby
 Spring Hill
 Trenton
 Woodbury

CREDENTIALING MADE EASY

Take care of your credentialing and recredentialing needs in our one-stop shop: DentalXChange.

Delta Dental of Tennessee's online credentialing tool is free and contains several time-saving features. Online forms have auto-populating fields, so you only need to enter information once. There's an online repository to store documents. You can e-sign your credentialing documents, too.

You won't receive a recredentialing package in the

mail anymore. Instead, the email from DentalXChange will include a link to our online credentialing portal. The portal contains everything you need for credentialing in one convenient location.

TIP: Make sure your email is accurate in DentalXChange to ensure efficient credentialing and alert delivery, and update your email if it changes.

Find more information at DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists.

OFFICE EFFICIENCY

**DOT + EFT =
MAX EFFICIENCY**
www.dentalofficetoolkit.com

95.53%

The drop-to-pay percentage rate in 2023 for Tennessee. These claims required no manual intervention!

48

When Delta Dental sends claim payments via EFT, they can hit your bank account in as little as 48 hours.

99.85%

The percentage of claims processed within 10 days.

10

The number of days it can take Delta Dental to process a paper claim.

NCIES



7 to 10

The number of days it can take to receive a paper check from claim payment.



FAST-TRACK YOUR CLAIMS:

Get paid faster

Ensure claims are processed efficiently—so you can be paid faster—with the following coding tips:

- Make sure you're using the most current CDT Code Manual.
- Note the difference between single unit crown and bridge, and bridge retainer codes for both natural teeth and implants (*example: D2750 vs. D6759 vs. D6069*).
- Ensure that codes are consistent for the metals or materials used—check for mixed metals and/or materials (*example: 6740-6240-6740*).
- Never omit a code even if you are not charging for it (*example: a recently crowned tooth that was extracted*).
- Always use the correct code to differentiate prosthetics supported by natural teeth or implants.
- 9999 codes (*example: D6999*) always require a clinical narrative (*use the ADA form remarks section*).
- Do not bundle codes and fees into one claim submission—every unit must be given an individual CDT code and fee.
- If you're unsure of a code, provide a detailed clinical narrative for the procedure on the claim. Include teeth numbers, procedure(s) and material types (*if applicable*).
- For all complicated surgical/grafting procedures, include a clinical narrative and copy of the patient treatment records or surgical report.
- Supernumerary teeth are numbered by adding 50 to the previous tooth.
- When submitting documentation related to scaling and root planing services, include a periodontal diagnosis, recent radiographs of all teeth involved, a recent periodontal chart, and a copy of the patient treatment records for the service provided, including the time spent if services were provided in three or more quadrants.
- Submit diagnostic radiographs:
 - Radiograph of the entire tooth/teeth for crowns and fixed partial dentures.
 - Radiograph of the implant(s) in place when submitting for a crown or fixed partial denture.



UNLOCKING GREATER BENEFITS FOR PATIENTS WITH special health care needs

by Kate Bartig

The Delta Dental Special Health Care Needs Benefit has been a welcome change for members and providers. The benefit removes barriers to care for your patients while providing you with the reimbursement and resources you need.

Delta Dental of Tennessee introduced the benefit in 2024 for eligible commercial-plan members who have a special health care need. The benefit covers:

- Additional visits to the dentist's office and/or consultations that can be helpful prior to the first treatment to help patients learn what to expect and what is needed for a successful dental appointment. (Codes D0120, D0145, D0150, D0160 and D0180)
- Up to four total dental cleanings in a benefit year. (Codes D1110, D1120, D4910, D4346 and D4355)
- Treatment delivery modifications, including anesthesia and nitrous oxide, necessary for dental staff to provide oral health care for patients with sensory sensitivities, behavioral challenges, severe anxiety or other barriers to treatment. (Code D9997)

When creating the benefit, Delta Dental sought to address challenges dentists face when treating patients with special health care needs, and further, how additional barriers may arise when the patient has a Medicaid dental plan versus commercial plan.

"The biggest part of this benefit, and the part I'm happiest about, is that this is an evergreen benefit," said Jeff Ballard, President and CEO of Delta Dental of Tennessee. "When members turn 26 and would normally age off their parents' benefits, they can stay on."

"Dentists know patients will age out of their benefits, but families don't always realize that. They'll spend years working with a dentist, and when the patient ages out of the policy and goes on Medicaid, it all comes crashing down. If we can keep children with a disability on a commercial policy as adults, they will be much better served," Ballard said.

The benefit also recognizes the additional time these patients need in the dental chair or office, and treatment delivery modifications that can help providers ensure comfortable care. Because many individuals with special health care needs are at higher risk for developing oral diseases, the benefit also covers more cleanings per year than standard commercial plans.

"If it's recommended a patient receive four cleanings per year, that's hard to do when the member, parent or caregiver is paying out of pocket. Now, dentists are able to do what they need to help keep their patients' mouths healthy, and it's covered by the benefit," Ballard said.

Help your patients take advantage of this benefit and ensure you receive the appropriate reimbursement by reviewing the Benefit FAQ section.





WHAT IS A SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEED?

As defined by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, special health care needs include any physical, developmental, mental, sensory, behavioral, cognitive, or emotional impairment or limiting condition that requires medical management, health care intervention and/or use of specialized services or programs. The condition may be congenital, developmental, or acquired through disease, trauma or environmental factors, and may impose limitations in performing daily self-maintenance activities or substantial limitations in major life activities.

CREATING A WELCOME SPACE

To help provide the best possible experience to patients with special health care needs, communicate regularly with them (and/or their parents or caregivers if applicable) about their needs. This may include determining whether additional visits would be helpful to build trust, identifying and accommodating sensory preferences, discussing communications preferences, and walking through what happens during a visit in advance.

Additionally, all U.S.-licensed dentists and their support personnel can enroll in free continuing education courses from Penn Dental Medicine's Center for Persons with Disabilities Presentation Series.

- The series aims to build awareness of the barriers to equitable oral health care for individuals with disabilities and develop competency to provide oral health care to this vulnerable population.
- The series includes live webinars and on-demand courses.
- Dentists completing 18 or more courses within a three-year period will earn a certificate of completion from Penn Dental Medicine, an ADA CERP Provider, as a Disabilities Dentistry Clinician Expert.
- Register for a free course at www.dental.upenn.edu/disabilitiescare.



BENEFIT FAQ

Who is eligible for this benefit? Any member of a Delta Dental group benefit plan who has a special health care need and whose group has opted in or not opted out of the benefits. The Special Health Care Needs Benefit is available to eligible members at any age. Members will maintain full dental benefits as long as they maintain eligibility via the "Special Health Care Needs" attribute in their file.

How do I submit a claim for this benefit? Before rendering services, check the member's procedure eligibility in the Dental Office Toolkit® (DOT) to verify coverage.

- If the member's record has been updated to allow for additional services under this benefit, there will be a message in DOT confirming this.
- If there is not already a message but the member says their Delta Dental plan includes the Special Health Care Needs Benefit and they have a qualifying special health care need—you should include code D9997 on the first line of the initial claim for this patient. (After the first claim processes, the member's procedure eligibility will update accordingly.)
- In DOT, the "Special Health Care Needs Benefit" message is different from the "Handicap" attribute.



SPOTLIGHT ON A TREND: value-based reimbursement


by Greig Davis, CPA, CVA, MST



In recent years, there has been a significant shift in health care reimbursement models, with a growing emphasis on value-based care. This approach prioritizes quality outcomes and patient satisfaction. Value-based reimbursements were initially associated with primary care and hospitals, and now dentistry is starting to adopt them.

Delta Dental of Tennessee understands it's a trending topic of conversation for dental providers, but we have no plans to implement value-based reimbursement in our commercial business.





What is value-based reimbursement, and can it benefit dentists? The goal of the value-based reimbursement model is to improve both patient care and the financial stability of dental practices. Only a few value-based systems are in place and, while promising, there is debate over what quality measures should be used and what impact they will have.

Value-based reimbursements incentivize dentists to focus on delivering high-quality, versus high-quantity service to their patients. Of course, most dentists aspire to deliver the best care possible as efficiently as possible. This model adds additional discipline and focus on preventive measures, oral health education and evidence-based treatment plans. A successful value-based program should result in more comprehensive care, and improved oral health and overall well-being.

Under the fee-for-service model, patients often visit multiple dental providers for different treatments, which can hinder continuity of care. Value-based reimbursements promote a team-based approach and coordinated care, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive treatment plans from a single dental provider or a closely coordinated group of specialists. This approach facilitates seamless communication, better treatment coordination and improved patient outcomes.

Value-based care encourages the integration of technology, such as electronic health records (EHRs) and data analytics, to enhance patient care and practice efficiency. Dentists can leverage these tools to collect and analyze data on patient outcomes, treatment effectiveness and cost-efficiency. This data-driven approach allows dentists to make informed decisions, identify areas for

By shifting the reimbursement model toward value, dental practices can prioritize patient outcomes and satisfaction, leading to improved oral health and long-term success.

The fee-for-service model should not encourage dentists to perform more procedures to generate higher revenue, but it can skew in that direction and still not guarantee financial stability. Value-based reimbursements, on the other hand, can provide a more predictable and sustainable revenue stream. By aligning reimbursements with quality outcomes, dentists can reduce unnecessary treatments and focus on preventive care. This shift can lead to better patient retention, increased referrals and long-term growth for dental practices.

Value-based reimbursements encourage dentists to engage patients actively in their treatment plans. This collaborative approach fosters a stronger patient-dentist relationship, where patients are involved in decisions regarding their oral health. Dentists can spend more time educating patients about preventive measures, oral hygiene practices and lifestyle modifications, leading to better oral health outcomes. Additionally, when patients experience improved outcomes and enhanced satisfaction, they may be more likely to stay loyal to their dental provider.

improvement, and provide evidence-based care that optimizes patient outcomes and reduces costs.

Value-based reimbursements offer numerous benefits to dentists, including a focus on quality care, financial stability, patient engagement, continuity of care and the integration of technology. By shifting the reimbursement model toward value, dental practices can prioritize patient outcomes and satisfaction, leading to improved oral health and long-term success.

Embracing value-based care represents a promising path forward for dentists as they strive to provide the highest quality of care for their patients.



Greig Davis is a dental CPA, serving dentists nationwide for more than 25 years. He is the founder of Dental ROI Associates in Farmington Hills, Mich., and Nashville, Tenn. For more information on value-based reimbursements, Davis can be reached at gdavis@dentalroiassociates.com.

We have no plans to implement value-based reimbursement in commercial offerings, but will continue to consider how programs could be structured to improve oral health.

INVESTING IN TENNESSEE'S ORAL HEALTH

by Ann Waller Curtis

This year, Delta Dental of Tennessee is celebrating 25 years of giving back to the community we call home. With our mission of ensuring healthy smiles, our not-for-profit organization donated more than \$70 million since 1999, giving to improve the oral and overall health of Tennesseans. Delta Dental, along with our philanthropic arm, the Smile180 Foundation, supports the state's dental colleges, children's hospitals, free and reduced-cost dental clinics, and other like-minded charities.

There are few things more important than investing in our own community's health and wellness. At Delta Dental, we believe it is our duty to give back and to help ensure our state has the resources it needs to be successful.

Through both our company and our Smile180 Foundation, we provide support to our state's vital organizations like St. Jude, the American Red Cross, the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation, charitable dental clinics, and more that help improve the health and



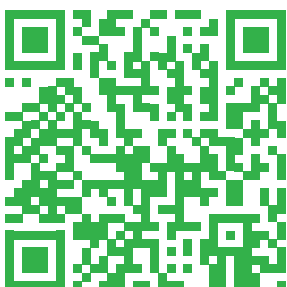


“ Giving back is a core part of our culture at Delta

well-being of our communities.

From our longstanding Holiday Card Campaign, which allows the public to help, in part, direct funds to children's hospitals, to newer traditions like Kids Dental Day, which encourages community partners to help give kids access to free dental screenings and cleanings, Delta Dental is committed to keeping the needs of Tennesseans at the forefront of everything we do.

As our network providers, we appreciate the work you are doing to ensure the healthy smiles of Tennesseans, too. We invite you to scan the QR Code below to check out our new webpage, highlighting 25 years of partnerships and giving back.



Dental, and we are committed to continuing these efforts for many more years to come. It is our honor to be able to participate in impactful events and programs along with our like-minded partners.”

Jeff Ballard
Delta Dental of Tennessee
President and CEO

**best
practice**
DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

CLAIMS INFORMATION!



Delta Dental of Tennessee has a new address for your claims. We will accept paper claims at our **P.O. Box 24810, Nashville, Tenn. 37202**. Claims will also be accepted via our fax number 615-244-8108. Of course, the fastest and easiest form of submission is through our Dental Office Toolkit (DOT). Submitting your claims online cuts down on processing time so you get your money in your account as fast as possible.

If you have questions concerning the best way to send claims or would like to sign up for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Thanks for reading!