



THE BRIDGE

News from Delta Dental of Tennessee

Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge,
Nashville, Tenn.

WINTER 2023

State of *Delta Dental of Tennessee*

It was a historic year for oral health in our state, and Delta Dental of Tennessee, along with our Smile180 Foundation, is proud to have played a role in the creation of the Healthy Smiles Initiative to expand access to oral healthcare for all Tennesseans. We could not have done that without the continued support from all of you, our network providers, and we hope to see the positive impacts it makes not only in our communities but in your dental offices as well.

Among other priorities, the Healthy Smiles Initiative focuses on closing the gap in care across the state. That includes providing incentives for dentists to live and work in rural communities where currently dental services are few and far between. It also pushes to expand class sizes in the state's dental schools to eventually increase the number of practicing dentists.

As major sponsors for the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Dentistry and Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry, we work with Tennessee's dental schools to make sure students are learning on state of art equipment and in facilities that resemble the types of clinics you all practice in, so those aspiring dentists will be ready to help provide care as soon as they graduate.

Those efforts to strengthen the oral healthcare of our communities coincide with our continued effort to provide a more valuable service, from the dentists that are part of our valued networks to the groups and individuals we serve. In 2022, about 400 new providers joined our PPO and/or Premier networks. Our growing networks of providers ensure that our members can find affordable dental care close to home. In addition, our expanding client base and membership ensure a large number of patients will be looking for a Delta Dental provider for oral health care. Delta Dental of Tennessee acquired more than 150 groups with more than 94,000 subscribers from January to October 2022, that's a 14.5% increase for the year.

We are not only excited about significant groups we have acquired, including the State of Tennessee, one of the largest employers in Tennessee. But also, we celebrate the major national companies like Amazon, Ford, and General Motors that are making significant investments in our state, basing employees here who are already Delta Dental members and will be looking to our network dentists for care.

This growth in membership numbers in turn increases the number of claims we process. We are proud to report that we continue to be one of the most efficient dental benefits carriers in terms of accuracy, speed, and cost of processing those claims. Performance reports for our customer service representatives show that 99 percent of claims are processed within 10 calendar days, and that is with a 100 percent payment and processing accuracy rate. We strive to continue meeting those statistics moving forward no matter the growth or changes we see along the way.

Continued on page 2

In the last year, Delta Dental of Tennessee has partnered with Farm Bureau to offer a bundled dental and vision product for the members of Tennessee Farm Bureau. This alone adds their 600,000 members with access to our plans, as well as a new Medicare Advantage plan with a \$3,000 annual maximum. We hope the impact of new alliances like this will be seen directly in the number of patients visiting you for care.

As we begin the new year, the leaders of Delta Dental of Tennessee will remain constant, but their roles are changing. Former CFO Jeff Ballard was named president in June when his internal oversight of the company began expanding. Dr. Phil Wenk remains the CEO of Delta Dental of Tennessee, though he is taking this opportunity to be more engaged with the work of the Smile180 Foundation.

We are so excited to continue this transition of leadership during the coming year. Delta Dental of Tennessee has a culture that exemplifies integrity, generosity and inclusiveness with an overarching goal of giving back to those in our communities who are underserved. It will be our mission to continue fostering these values as we lead Delta Dental into the future.



Jeff Ballard
President



Dr. Phil Wenk
CEO



Navigating the *white coat syndrome*

The rite of passage for every health professional known as the White Coat Ceremony is similar in name to a phenomenon that can affect the patients of those professionals—the white coat syndrome. According to the Mayo Clinic, the condition occurs when blood pressure readings at a health care provider's office are higher than they are in other settings, such as at home. It impacts an estimated 15 to 30 percent of people with high blood pressure readings in the dentist's office.

In addition, the CDC estimates that nearly half of adults in the United States have hypertension in general. Blood pressure measurement is an important screening vital sign at dental visits and can impact the way a dentist treats his or her patient. In extreme cases, it could lead to delays in dental work and immediate referral to a physician to further assess the problem.

Sometimes that leads to the use of medication in treating hypertension, which can have oral side

effects of its own. One of those conditions is known as gingival enlargement, a condition that causes the gums to swell and grow over teeth eventually leading to severe periodontal infection if left untreated. Less severe, but more common side effects include dry mouth, changes in taste, and oral lesions.



It is important to ensure your patients are aware of these possibilities and stay on top of their oral health with regular checkups, in some cases more frequently than the recommended twice a year. In dealing with patients who experience white coat syndrome, some dental clinics offer sedation options including nitrous oxide, IV sedation, and oral sedation. Besides sedation options, some dentists are trying other ways to lower patients' risks of white coat

syndrome including exchanging their white coats for colorful scrubs and personal protective equipment to create a more relaxed clinical environment. Others find that simply communicating with patients can put them at ease.

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.

Earl R Whaley & Company	Alcoa	Perfecta LLC	Memphis
Somavac Medical Solutions, Inc.	Bartlett	Excellent Roofing, LLC	Memphis
Fellowship Bible Church	Brentwood	Action Chemical, Inc.	Memphis
Genie Group, Inc.	Brentwood	Coleman and Owen	
Vallis Automotive Centers LLC	Carthage	Construction, Inc	Memphis
Momentum Behavioral		Tennessee Tires LLC	Memphis
Analysis, LLC	Crossville	Industrial Parts and Electric	
Let It Shine Gymnastics, Inc.	Franklin	Motor, Inc.	Memphis
Franklin Christian Church	Franklin	Precision Pools & Spas LLC	Mt Juliet
High Octane Operations LLC		BOSSIV LLC	Murfreesboro
a TN Company	Franklin	Murfreesboro Pharmaceutical	
West Hills Tractor	Jonesborough	Nursing Supply dba MPNS	Murfreesboro
McLain Heating and Cooling Inc.	Kingsport	Bellevue's Best Self Storage LP	Nashville
Grace Electric, LLC	Knoxville	National Certified Alarms, Inc.	Nashville
Cokesbury United Methodist		Fat Bottom Brewing Co.	Nashville
Church	Knoxville	Pollock Printing, Inc.	Nashville
Witt Building Material Company	Knoxville	Uniply, Inc.	Nashville
East Tennessee Nephrology	Knoxville	Nashville Urology, PC	Nashville
Professional Financial Staff, Inc.	Knoxville	Allen H. Edmondson Electrical	
TDH, Inc.	Knoxville	Contractor, Inc.	Powell
Hurst Excavating, LLC	Knoxville		
REA, Inc.	Knoxville		
Lawrenceburg Federal Bank	Lawrenceburg		
BGC, Inc.	Lebanon		
AUBO Robotics	Lenoir City		
MDI Contracting, LLC	Lenoir City		
Marcole Enterprises, LLC	Manchester		
A & L Heating and Air, LLC	Maryville		
Recreation & Parks Commission -			
Maryville Alcoa Blount County	Maryville		
ICC International	Maryville		
JMC Express, Inc.	Memphis		
Chick-fil-A Summer Ave	Memphis		
Burch, Porter, & Johnson, LLC.	Memphis		
Mississippi Boulevard			
Christian Church	Memphis		

New Delta Dental Providers

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Thomas Cranfill	Adamsville	Clark Cressman	Hixson
Paul Gerhardt	Adamsville	Luke Bessmer	Hixson
Kevin Hathorne	Adamsville	Djenane Lemaire	Hixson
Kianna Simmons	Adamsville	Donald Mauney	Jackson
Rachelle Ifill	Adamsville	Allison James	Johnson City
Harold Meacham	Adamsville	Courtney Blankenship	Johnson City
Randall Rudolph	Adamsville	Kenneth Hale	Kingston
Ronald Smith	Adamsville	Cody Christensen	Knoxville
Arash Arab	Antioch	Charles Comford	Knoxville
Brian Salvie	Athens	Lauren Fey	Knoxville
Michael Jordan	Athens	Michael Luethke	Knoxville
Larry McReynolds	Athens	Kashyap Patel	Knoxville
Caitlin Rudsenske	Bells	Raven Anderson	LaVergne
Uju Nwizu	Brentwood	Eric Basta	Lebanon
Allison Wilson	Brentwood	Eliza Gilbert	Lebanon
Sean Hwang	Chattanooga	Miranda Ritter	Maryville
Tom Cho	Chattanooga	Anna Compton	Memphis
Rylan Gustafson	Chattanooga	Andrew Kawasaki	Memphis
Jonathan Salinas	Chattanooga	Nicholas Mechas	Memphis
Ciara Wilke	Chattanooga	Lauren Vieira	Memphis
Mitchell Yates	Chattanooga	Brett Wilson	Memphis
Mary George	Clarksville	Marcellous Stansberry	Millington
Yo Lee	Clarksville	Tanya Mohsen	Murfreesboro
Heath Meyer	Clarksville	Kristin Schmitter-Webster	Murfreesboro
Paul Denemark	Clarksville	Aisha Ba	Nashville
Margaret Bauer	Cleveland	Austin Czarnecki	Nashville
James McAnly	Cookeville	Alyssa Janssen	Nashville
Aaron Brooksbank	Cookeville	Chasity Muhammad	Nashville
Eiriny Meshreky	Cookeville	Reetane Singh	Nashville
Courtney Upchurch	Cordova	Ajay Singh	Nashville
Abby Vinall	Cordova	Amir Sonni	Nashville
Kylie Rozelle	Crossville	Joshua Zarabi	Nashville
Elizabeth Conley	Crossville	Allison Stump	Oak Ridge
Diana Mayo	Franklin	Gregory Conner	Oak Ridge
Alan Liu	Gallatin	Michelle Shipp	Oliver Springs
Wafa Hamid	Goodlettsville	Leonard Martin	Oneida
George Bare	Goodlettsville	Terrence Campbell	Smyrna
Arian Johnson	Hendersonville	Paul Deines	Smyrna
Johnny Williams	Hendersonville	Ryan Jolley	Sparta
Oluyemi Falaiye	Hermitage		

Dentists assist in detecting developmental disorders in kids



We know that overall health starts with a healthy smile, and researchers are examining another significant link to oral health: developmental disorders. A study published in the Pediatric Dental Journal looks at the necessity for screening for developmental disorders in children and ensuring that the children suspected of having them receive specific support, especially dentists' role in that screening.

Health checkups in pediatric patients, among other things, assess the growth and development of children. According to an article in Dr. Bicuspid, dentists in Japan have been performing health checkups to screen children for developmental disorders collectively with other health professionals using a mouth rinsing function test (MRFT). The test analyzes the oral function in pediatric patients and seeks to determine the relationship between developmental disorders and oral function.

The study found about 30 percent of patients were suspected of having developmental disorders based on the MRFT assessment. Children

suspected of having developmental disorders had significantly poor oral function. Although there were some children without suspected disorders who also had poor oral function.

Researchers concluded it is challenging for dentists and hygienists to diagnose developmental disorders based solely on the results of the MRFT. However, dentists play a crucial part in diagnosing and treating patients with developmental disorders.

For example, children with autism spectrum disorder often have poor oral health due to hyperreactivity to sensory input, making it difficult to maintain good oral hygiene. The study authors urge that collaboration with other health professionals is crucial for early screening and child support during their development, as well as ensuring good oral health and improvement in oral function.

Become a Disabilities Dentistry Clinician Expert

With the goal of helping to improve access to dental care for individuals with disabilities, Penn Dental Medicine has established a new continuing education series through the support of Delta Dental.

- Live webinars and on-demand courses
- Open to any U.S. licensed dentist and their support personnel at no charge
- Dentists completing 18 or more of the courses within a three-year period will receive a certificate of completion from Penn Dental Medicine, an ADA CERP Provider, as a Disabilities Dentistry Clinician Expert.

Did you know?
In the United States, there are nearly 57 million people with disabilities.



Register for a free course at
www.dental.upenn.edu/disabilitiescare



Delta Dental of Tennessee
240 Venture Circle • Nashville, TN 37228-1699



Good health habits start at a young age, and to help encourage kids to drink more water, Delta Dental of Tennessee has developed a grant program known as “Water’s Cool @ School” to replace school water fountains with contactless Elkay bottle-filling stations.

Since 2020, Delta Dental has installed stations in 80 schools across 57 different Tennessee cities. This year, 30 Tennessee schools serving students grades K-12 will be awarded grants.

As part of the grant application process, students and schools are invited to submit creative projects such as a video or artwork about what makes water “cool” to them. Visit www.DeltaDentalTN.com/WCS to learn more about the program and to see lists of our previous grant recipients.

Delta Dental will be announcing the new grant recipients in early 2023.