

# JADA<sup>+</sup> CAREER GUIDE

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Rethinking How You Start Your Day

Shopping Ergonomically:  
Choosing Chairs for Posture and Productivity

'Friending' Patients:  
What Are Potential Ethical Considerations?





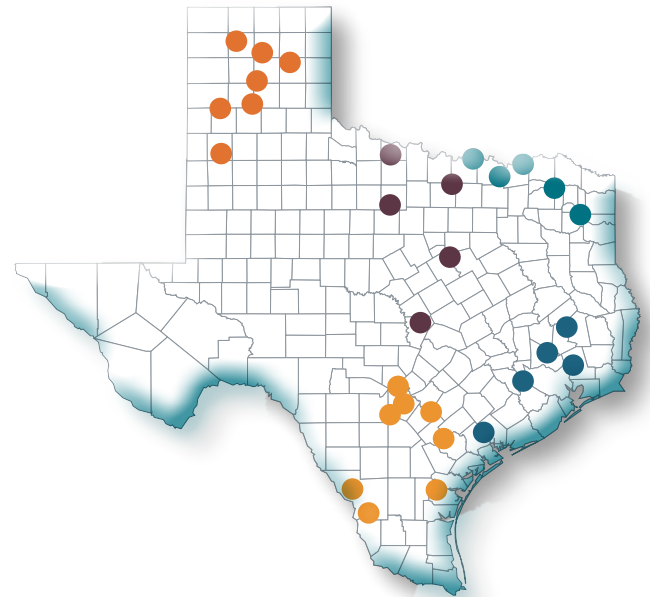
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# Staying Connected

## Profile: Dr. Chithra Durgam



Dr. Chithra Durgam

**C**amaraderie and affinity can mean the difference between success and failure for some professionals, especially in careers in which representation of some groups has been sporadic or where staying connected in general may be challenging.

Dr. Chithra Durgam, a dentist in private practice in North Bergen, N.J., has firsthand experience in closing such gaps through her 18 years as a general dentist.

“The profession can be isolating because we are entrepreneurs who are also operators within the business, so our time is limited. We’re trying to build our business, manage multiple family commitments and then pursue other opportunities. With so much to juggle, it can be difficult to find colleagues willing to take time to share their experiences,” Dr. Durgam said.

Being a woman in dentistry, Dr. Durgam has overcome some frustrating incidents related to gender. She spent four years as an associate in another dental office before launching her own, which she’s grown over 14 years in private practice.

“I found, prior to being in my own office, that there were definitely times when gender roles came into play,” Dr. Durgam said. “For instance, when I worked for somebody else, they had female dentists treating children and the adults were seen by men.”

Another time, she rented office space from a dentist who tended to offer unsolicited advice. “I had a landlord who was a practicing dentist in a nearby town, and he was constantly trying to give me orders on how to run my office, even though he had no ownership in it,” Dr. Durgam said. But Dr. Durgam hasn’t let any

such challenges undermine her professional growth. “Being able to break away from that, establish my business, pursue speaking opportunities and pursue entrepreneurial endeavors where I’m ultimately the one making the decisions has been life-changing for me,” she said.

She’s found ways to engage both female and male dentists in supporting her trajectory while also giving back to the profession in general. She is a member of the board of directors of the Hudson County Dental Society and the Bergen County CASA (National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association) and volunteers widely with her practice at dental events. She also mentors other women regularly.

Dr. Durgam has found that building camaraderie outside of gender is as important as developing affinity with other women. Some of her biggest supporters, in fact, she said, have been men.

“As much as I want women to succeed, the rise in my career would be attributed to men. At key points, the contribution of famous men gave me a chance I would not otherwise receive,” she said. “Lew Leone of Fox News gave me a chance to be on Good Day New York to discuss the importance of flossing to dispute the 2016 AP [Associated Press] study on the medical benefits of flossing and Gary Vaynerchuk, who included me in his No. 1 New York Times best-seller list book, *Crushing It!*, took the time to take a chance on me which paid huge dividends.

“I hope our profession moves in the direction where we are all supporting each other because we need men to support us. It’s very important that we’re working



together. But, it's very important that we as women also work together and collaborate because we have a special bond of similar life experiences."

Dr. Durgam has built a reputation for her deft use of social media to promote her practice, Aesthetic Dental, which has fed an active speaking avocation. She sees social media as a sort of great equalizer for dental practices and a way that women dentists can help level the playing field for opportunities. "One of the best ways to grow a dental practice is to develop your personal brand. Whether you are an employee dentist or own your own practice, your personal brand and reputation will always stay with you. As dentists, we tend to invest in our clinical skills, which change as technology advances, but outsource our brand and advertising to third parties. In the future, the longevity of a dentist's career will be predicated on his or her brand presence."

Networking widely is something that Dr. Durgam recommends to women at every stage of their careers. "It's important to never put networking on the back

burner," she said. "It's easy to dismiss networking as a nonproductive activity when you could be spending time with family or reading a dental journal. The time to be networking is now. When a crisis or situation comes up where you need advice, you can't rely on others when you haven't been spending time building relationships. Also, without strong relationships, the willingness of the other person to help and give his or her very best is diminished."

For more information on Dr. Durgam, visit her website <https://www.adentalonline.com/dr-chithra-durgam.html>. ■

*Ms. Williams is a Chicago-based freelance writer and editor who specializes in practice and research news for dental and medical professionals. She can be reached at [writewoman12@hotmail.com](mailto:writewoman12@hotmail.com).*

*Jean Williams, Staying connected, Dental Practice Success, Summer 2019. Copyright 2019 © American Dental Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.*

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## BMO Harris Bank, ADA Collaborate to Support Women Entrepreneurs

In a 2018 study on woman entrepreneurs, BMO Harris Bank identified sexism and harassment as barriers to advancement and highlighted a greater need for mentoring programs and networks. BMO is collaborating with the American Dental Association to offer a number of resources to encourage and support women dentists, including tailored networking events and shared online resources.

"Women don't have much time," said Mollie Gawronski, head of Business Relationship Sales with BMO Harris Bank. "We have busy lives, so it is important to find some people who you can actually connect with that will support growth toward achieving personal goals and business goals and make you feel like you're part of a community."

I think that's what we've seen at the ADA, and we're trying to work with them on building out different events ... so that it feels like more than just networking."

BMO Harris Bank, the ADA Member Advantage endorsed provider for practice financing, is collaborating with the ADA on developing programming for women dentists to foster connections that bear more fruit than typical networking.

The ADA has established a successful Women in Dentistry Leadership Series that has been presented at ADA 2017 in Atlanta, ADA 2018 in Honolulu, and at ADA FDI World Dental Congress in San Francisco in 2019. But ADA members are thinking even bigger. A motivated group of volunteers, partners and ADA staff members are joining forces to create year-round

programming for the Women in Dentistry initiative, both nationally and with state and local societies. Along with other corporate supporters, BMO Harris will develop and present these events.

Ms. Gawronski states, "More than special member rates, we want to create a whole program to help dentists succeed. One facet of that program is supporting the ADA's Women in Dentistry initiative."




Ms. Mollie Gawronski

BMO Harris Bank offers all ADA members outstanding service and rates as the only practice financing provider recommended for ADA Members. "We're the preferred lender for practice financing," said Ms. Gawronski. "So, if there's a dentist who wants to buy out his or her partner or if a dentist is looking to sell his or her practice, we could help that incoming dentist acquire, pay for and finance that. That's what the My BMO relationship is." ADA Members will receive special rate, at a .5% rate reduction on practice loans up to \$1,000,000. Custom pricing is available for loans exceeding \$1,000,000.

For more information about BMO Harris Bank visit [www.bmoharris.com/dentists](http://www.bmoharris.com/dentists).

To learn more about other ADA Member Advantage-endorsed companies, visit [www.adamemberadvantage.com](http://www.adamemberadvantage.com). ■

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# Rethinking How You Start Your Day

**A** dental practice, like any business, is always in motion. And regardless of how well you plan your day there will be surprises and frustrations. This is the normal course of business, especially when dealing with numerous patients and complex dental care. How you start your day can be a key asset in helping you work through all the schedules, activities and inevitable challenges that take place. Have you ever heard the expression “How you start is how you’ll finish?” Well, it’s true. Everything is easier when the day starts properly with a sense of organization and communication.

## Always Start Off On The Right Foot

Following these six recommendations will revolutionize your effectiveness, productivity and satisfaction every day. There will still be scheduling issues, complex treatments that don’t go as planned, surprises and emergencies, but all of this will be easier to manage when you start the day off right.

**1. Arrive At The Office On Time.** Doctors and office managers are leaders and when they arrive late they send a clear message to everyone else that being late is OK. When you consistently arrive on time you send a message that you are organized, committed and ready to go — and the team should be as well.

**2. Compliment Or Recognize Team Members As You Prepare For The Day.** Complimenting someone on a job well done, mentioning your excitement over having achieved all of the day’s goals and letting people know you appreciate them goes a long way toward creating the behaviors that you want to see in your team. People love

to know that they are appreciated. It raises motivation, self-esteem and a desire to do an excellent job.

**3. Bring Your A-game.** Your A-game represents bringing your best self to work every day whether you feel like it or not. Just imagine a sports coach showing up to a critical game and revealing that he had a bad night and doesn’t really want to be there. How would that go? Find a way to tap into your A-game with energy and enthusiasm every day.

**4. Be Prepared.** Go over the checklist that you use each day before seeing patients. What was left over from yesterday? What’s on the checklist that hasn’t been done? What are the standard operating procedures that take place every morning that allow you to be ready for the day? When you are highly prepared and organized, it sets the tone for the way the entire office operates. It also prevents you from worrying about what was done, playing catch-up or making mistakes.

**5. Have An Effective Daily Business Meeting.** Set an agenda for all of the important items of the day including the schedule, new patients, referrals, outstanding payments, emergencies and any other concerns from the team. The daily business meeting is one of the most powerful activities you can do to help reduce frustration and enhance communication throughout the day.

**6. Expect To Have Fun.** In the science of positive psychology, founded by Dr. Martin Seligman, simply telling yourself that “this will be fun” often changes your entire mindset instantly from something that may have been routine or bad to something that’s fun. It’s an amazing psychological tool that works for most



people, showing them that if they expect to have fun they probably will.

Nothing is as important as how you start your day. These six recommendations can help revolutionize any office. You'll notice a change in attitude and behavior for the better almost instantly. ■



*Dr. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the founder and CEO of Levin Group, a dental management consulting firm that has worked with over 30,000 dental practices since 1985. He has written 65 books and over 4,000 articles on practice management and marketing. He has been featured in the*

*Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Time magazine and is the creator of the Levin Group Tip of the Day which has over 30,000 subscribers. Learn more at [www.levingroup.com](http://www.levingroup.com) or email [rlevin@levingroup.com](mailto:rlevin@levingroup.com).*

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## ADA CareerCenter Unveils Upgraded Online Job Board for Dental Professionals

By Kimber Solana

Dental professionals looking for the right job can turn to the ADA CareerCenter, the Association's official online job board, which unveiled July 17 its upgraded website in an effort to improve user experience and personalization of jobs searches.

The online job board features a new personalization dashboard, which provides a more user-friendly experience for jobseekers and generates more relevant responses for employers and dental professionals, according to ADA CareerCenter.

New features include employer custom content; company profiles and branding with the ability to use video and images; searchable tags; employer resume access; premium job postings; job of the week; employer profile page; targeting job campaigns; and social push job, which makes it easier to share a job via social media.

In addition, the job alerts feature can be customized by keyword, location, specialty, career level, salary, hours, contract

type and recruiter type. Dentists and other dental professionals can also choose how often they receive the alert, whether daily or weekly.

For employers looking for jobseekers, they have access to a unique page that allows them to share details about their company and explain why a jobseeker should choose them over somewhere else. Employers can add pictures, videos and links to educate jobseekers. ■

For more information on the ADA CareerCenter, visit [careercenter.ada.org](http://careercenter.ada.org).

*Kimber Solana, ADA CareerCenter unveils upgraded online job board for dental professionals, ADA News, June 17, 2019. Copyright 2019 © American Dental Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.*

# Shopping Ergonomically: Choosing Chairs for Posture and Productivity



**A**re you planning to make upgrades to the chairs in your dental operatory but are wondering where to start? My advice is to think ergonomically and practically. Is it necessary to replace all of the chairs? Or should you replace one at a time as needed? Some key ergonomic questions can help you decide.

## The Patient Chair

The goal is the getting to the oral cavity. A thick, padded back can limit the dentist's ability to comfortably place his or her legs under the chair. A wide back rest can limit easy access to the oral cavity and the ability to maintain a proper, balanced working posture. The path of least resistance requires that the patient chair be thin and narrow behind the patient's head. Patient comfort is important but not at the risk of limiting the dentist's access to the oral cavity. An adjustable head and neck support for the patient will allow him or her to be properly supported and positioned for procedures. Lastly, can the chair be easily adjusted from left- to right-handed? When choosing a chair, ask yourself, can I maintain good, balanced posture when treating a patient?

## The Operator Stool

The operator stool should be infinitely adjustable to provide the dentist with support and comfort while in a balanced working posture. The seat should adjust up and down, as well as tilt slightly forward to allow the dentist's hips to be slightly higher than his or her knees. This position will place the pelvis into an anterior tilt

facilitating a balanced position of the spine (see photo below).



The height of the hydraulic cylinder should also allow the dentist to assume this position. Taller people should consider a taller cylinder. When in doubt, ask your vendor for a trial period to ensure you have a cylinder that is the appropriate height. The back of the operator chair should adjust up and down as well as anteriorly and posteriorly. The adjustability of the back should provide support for the dentist while in a balanced sitting position.

Another option to consider is a version of the saddle seat, which is available from a number of manufacturers. The saddle seat allows for a range of heights that lets the dentist move from sitting to a semistanding position. Generally there are three types: standard,



which is more like a motorcycle seat; the English riding saddle version, and the newer split saddle. Although all of these offer differing features, the ultimate choice is quite individual, and I would strongly recommend using a stool for a trial period before buying it for a number of anatomic reasons. Remember, there is no “one size fits all.” The saddle seat is a bit of an acquired taste, and it is absolutely necessary to try it before you buy it.

## Armrests

There are a number of options for armrests. Many practitioners have spent their entire careers working without their arms supported. Research published in Journal of the California Dental Association showed that dental practitioners spend nearly half of their working day in poor seated postures. Specifically, forward head with rounded shoulders, elevated arms, kyphotic upper backs and a flexed lumbar spine (see photo below).



The infamous “chicken wing” position becomes the working “norm” (see photo below).



Poor working postures add additional stress to an already busy day. Arm supports, both built-in or after-market add-ons can be an invaluable stress reducer for the dental practitioner during the working day, adding minutes, hours or even days of comfort for a usually uncomfortable practitioner. Evidence has shown that arm support can

facilitate a more appropriate, balanced work position while alleviating stress on the upper quarter of the practitioner. The armrest must comfortably support the upper extremities and should allow 360 degrees of movement. The armrest should not limit the practitioner to a particular plane of movement. Make sure the contour and padding of an armrest does not place undue stress on the neuromuscular structures of the forearm or interfere with the position or movement of the practitioner. Lastly, the armrests should be able to be easily moved out of the way when not needed.



## Assistant Stool

The assistant stool should possess similar characteristics to the operator stool to provide support and comfort. With regard to the “belly bar,” it’s time to move away from it to a better balance position. The belly bar tends to obligate the assistant to assume a poor seated position that can limit productivity and, ultimately, career longevity. Usually, the root of the problem with this poor position is the operator’s insistence on strictly using direct visualization along with the dentist putting his or her head in the line of sight of the assistant. A number of assistant programs have instituted use of a saddle seat which will allow a semistanding position while being able to get close to the oral cavity. Well-coordinated, four-handed dentistry along with good balanced posture will allow the assistant to assume a better-balanced seated position.

## Ball Seat

There are a number of clinicians who have chosen a more out-of-the-box seating system, namely the balance ball. Although it may seem that sitting on a ball to perform dental procedures may be inherently too unstable, there are a fair number of clinicians who have chosen this approach — a workout while sitting to work approach. There is a small learning curve to get it tuned in and this may include a fall or two. This approach engages your core and postural muscles while you work. The shortcomings are lack of adjustability in height, particularly if one shares the chair with a much taller or shorter colleague and the inability for the dental assistant to use it effectively. ■



*Continued on Page 14*



# ‘Friending’ Patients: What Are The Potential Ethical Considerations?

**Q:** As caring, compassionate, and friendly practitioners, we naturally care and are curious about our patients and their lives. We certainly garner information on many of our patients’ typical family activities, vacations, purchases, life changes, and other events as a part of interacting with them in a treatment setting.

In fact, this is often how we best display our concern for them beyond perceiving them as merely dental cases needing treatment. However, in recent history, we are faced with another entirely new way to interact with patients, and that is the various social media sites that are so common now. One of the most prominent is, of course, Facebook. For the sake of simplicity, we will consider Facebook here as our example case. The question is whether “friending” patients on Facebook is ethical. Some ethical issues include the following: Should you have a “Practice Only” page that you link and share with patients? Is it appropriate to link your personal page to their pages?

**A:** Among the issues to consider with social media is the very real fact that posted information is seen and shared by others. It can be shared beyond the original intended recipients. This can have unintended consequences and potential ethical repercussions.

There are consequences to consider, such as patients’ viewing something on your personal page that is embarrassing or somehow compromising, thereby exposing risk to your professional and community reputation. Perhaps those family gatherings or a recent college reunion bash and all their related posted pictures are not such a great idea to share with the public and

your patients. Is it not preferable to separate social relationships from professional relationships? Is this not related to the reason why it is considered ethically problematic to have personal relationships with patients?<sup>1</sup>

The Introduction and Preamble of the American Dental Association’s Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct (ADA Code) state, “The dental profession holds a special position of trust within society. As a consequence, society affords the profession certain privileges that are not available to members of the public-at-large. In return, the profession makes a commitment to society that its members will adhere to high ethical standards of conduct,” and that dentists will “follow high ethical standards which have the benefit of the patient as their primary goal.”<sup>2</sup>

These sections of the ADA Code make it clear that as professionals we are obligated to adhere to the highest possible ethical standards and to place our patients’ well-being above any concerns of our own.

Bearing this mandate in mind, perhaps it is wisest to interact with patients on Facebook only via maintaining the professional relationship through a professional page. Sharing your personal activities and exploits with patients seems more than a bit removed from providing any benefit to the patients. It would seem it is a benefit you enjoy, as you wish to share your fun, activities, and good fortune with them for your own reasons.

What is the benefit to the patients in such a social relationship? How does the fact that you have access to their personal lives benefit them? You might enjoy the knowledge, but our goal is to benefit the patients. An argument could be made that sharing more about

yourself might benefit the patients by making you more of a “real person” rather than their “dentist.” However, a practice-based site can provide this information in a more professional and controlled manner.

What are the consequences of knowledge gained through this connection that exists outside the dentist-patient relationship? There are potential dangers and complications associated with knowledge you might gain from the patients’ personal pages. What if you learn they abuse drugs or alcohol? What if you learn teens are smoking or engaging in other behaviors they deny or that their parents might not know about?

In Section 2, the principle Nonmaleficence (“do no harm”) explains, “The dentist has a duty to refrain from harming the patient.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the principle “expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to protect the patient from harm.”<sup>1</sup> Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligation includes doing nothing that is harmful to the patient. It seems wise to be aware that getting too involved in patients’ personal business offers more chances for harm than it does for any benefit.

Section 2.G, Personal Relationships With Patients, explains, “Dentists should avoid interpersonal relationships that could impair their professional judgment or risk the possibility of exploiting the confidence placed in them by a patient.”<sup>1</sup> This section certainly seems to apply here. A personal connection on social media seems ripe for any number of hazards that this section is designed to protect against.

In Section 5, the principle Veracity (“truthfulness”) states that “The dentist has a duty to communicate truthfully.” The section explains,

This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to be honest and trustworthy in their dealings with people. Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligations include respecting the position of trust inherent in the dentist-patient relationship, communicating truthfully and without deception, and maintaining intellectual integrity.<sup>1</sup>

As we work to preserve the trust and integrity of the profession in the eyes of the public, it does not seem helpful to offer simultaneously online material that conceivably could undermine that same trust and integrity. Postings that are visible to our patients that may seem appropriate in a social setting are often inappropriate in a professional relationship.

Finally, Section 5.F.6, Websites and Search Engine Optimization, seems to be a summary of this issue in that it states, “Many dentists employ an Internet web site to announce their practices, introduce viewers to the professionals and staff in the office, describe practice philosophies and impart oral health care information to the public.”<sup>1</sup> Although this is not unethical, “Dentists have an ethical obligation to ensure that their web sites, like their other professional announcements, are truthful and

do not present information in a manner that is false and misleading in a material respect.”<sup>1</sup>

The bottom line is that your online sites and actions should comport with the ADA Code and its important guidance for behaving ethically and professionally.

In the old days, it was easier to separate a professional relationship from a personal one. The boundaries were clearer and easier to maintain. Caution should be the watchword, and, if in doubt, err on the side of being the “professional” and not the “friend.”

When patients entered into a dentist-patient relationship, they did not automatically agree to a personal relationship or to be your “friend.” There can be a feeling of undue pressure from them to accept your friend request because of your position of authority in the relationship. You should also be cautious about accepting any friend request initiated by the patients.

Be extremely careful about what you post and share. Much like negative reviews posted online, the information is there to stay whether you like it or not. ■

*Dr. Howley is retired from practicing general dentistry in North Wales, PA, and is a member of the American Dental Association Council on Ethics, Bylaws and Judicial Affairs.*



Dr. Tom Howley

*What are the potential ethical considerations of a dentist connecting, that is, “friending,” on social media with a patient of record? The Journal of the American Dental Association, June 2019. Copyright 2019 © American Dental Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission*

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<https://www.ada.org/en/about-the-ada/principles-of-ethics-code-of-professional-conduct>

Date accessed: March 31, 2019

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Mr. Caruso is a practicing physical therapist with 30 years of experience. He has worked extensively with the dental profession in ergonomics, injury prevention, productivity, exercise and wellness and is a member of the ADA Dental Wellness Advisory Committee. He is president and cofounder of the Kids Equipment Network, a not-for-profit organization that has provided over 2,000 children with special needs adaptive equipment at no cost. Contact him at [carusopt@ameritech.net](mailto:carusopt@ameritech.net).



Timothy Caruso, *Choosing chairs for posture and productivity*, Dental Practice Success, Summer 2019. Copyright 2019 © American Dental Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.



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## **Have You Talked to Your Patients About Substance Abuse?**

**By Jennifer Garvin**

In March 2018, the ADA announced a new policy demonstrating the Association's commitment to fighting opioid abuse while continuing to help patients manage dental pain.

Broaching substance abuse or opioid misuse can be difficult for providers. The National Institute on Drug Abuse created a new webpage, Screening for Substance Use in the Dental Setting, to help dentists and members of the dental team recognize the signs of risky substance use and addiction.

Visit [Drugabuse.gov](http://Drugabuse.gov) and search "substance abuse screening."

Tips include:

- Taking a health history of the patient that includes discussing substance abuse.
- Referring patients with untreated addiction to a local behavioral health provider.
- Explaining the research on opioids versus over-the-counter pain medications. The ADA recommends the use of nonopioid medications as a first line of defense.
- Reassuring patients who are in addiction recovery that their dental-related pain will be managed.

- Checking your state's prescription drug monitoring program.
- Staying up to date by familiarizing yourself with the latest guidelines.

As a public service, the ADA Center for Professional Success website offers free access to information on safe prescribing, online continuing education and other tools for managing dental pain, especially for patients who are at risk for drug overdose or addiction. This includes archived recordings of the ADA's opioid prescribing webinar series. The ADA also offers free online continuing education courses on safe and effective analgesic prescribing for dental pain. ■

Visit [Success.ADA.org](http://Success.ADA.org) and search "opioids." Urge patients to visit [MouthHealthy.org/rxabuse](http://MouthHealthy.org/rxabuse) to learn more about keeping prescription drugs from becoming a source of harm.

*Jennifer Garvin, Have you talked to your patients about substance abuse?, New Dentist News, May 2019. Copyright 2019 © American Dental Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.*





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