



Dentistry

IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Allied Staff News

From Chaos to Collaboration: Transforming Dental Office Culture

Dental practices across the state are feeling the ripple effects of staffing shortages. More turnover, heavier workloads, and carryover from previous jobs have created new challenges for office culture. While dentistry has always been demanding, many teams now find themselves navigating conflict, gossip, triangulation, and generational misunderstandings on top of more demanding patients.

What makes these challenges especially tough is that they rarely stay contained. The stress of staffing shortages spills into daily interactions, shaping how colleagues treat one another under pressure.

These pressures can cause challenging patterns. Recognizing them is the first step to changing them.

Here are trends that I'm seeing:

- **Conflict and Triangulation.** Instead of addressing issues directly, staff vent to others. This damages trust.
- **Passive Aggressive Behavior.** Comments under their breath, silent treatment, or subtle digs can erode team morale.
- **Overwork from Short Staffing.** When schedules are overflowing, people are not taking breaks, keeping boundaries, or allowing for self-care. When clinics are short staffed for a long period of time, it can lead to burnout.
- **Gossip and "Mean Girls" Culture.** When resources are scarce, competition and conflict often increase. Cliques create fear and division.
- **Delaying Conversations.** Office managers and dentists may delay constructive criticism or call out poor behaviors due to fear that the employee will quit. By delaying the discussion though, it frustrates the other team members.

These patterns can change. With intention, tension can be redirected toward collaboration. Change often starts with small, consistent actions that build trust.

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Mary Wolf, LPC-MH, BCC

2026 Annual Session Featured Clinician:

Katrina Klein RDH, CEAS, CPT



Katrina Klein is a Registered Dental Hygienist and Certified Personal Trainer who is dedicated to helping dental professionals stay pain-free during their career. With her extensive knowledge of biomechanics and ergonomic strategies, Katrina has implemented daily practices that prevent injury and promote posture enhancement for dental professionals. She is aware of the difficulties associated with working at a desk as well as being in the mouth. She focuses on biomechanics and how to apply them to daily routines to prevent injury. She performs ergonomic assessments chairside and offers personal training virtually to clients for posture enhancement focused fitness to help eliminate pain. Preparing the body for a difficult workload can make the difference between practicing in pain and not. Katrina practices what she preaches and can relate to the struggles of dental professionals.

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Strategies to Build a Healthier Culture:

- **Address Conflict at the Source.** Encourage a culture of direct communication. If there's an issue, talk to the person involved instead of a third party.
- **Set Standards for Professional Behavior.** I have encouraged some clinics to use a "commitment to my coworkers" that outlines professionalism and expectations for how team members will communicate. Team members are involved in creating these expectations and then once agreed upon, all team members sign it. There are many examples of pledge/commitment to coworkers online.
- **Protect Breaks.** Protecting time for breaks. A few minutes can increase patience.
- **Lead by Example.** Everyone can lead from where they are. Staying calm, professional, and approachable are keys to contributing to a better culture.

Culture shifts when individuals take ownership of their role in it. That starts with self-reflection.

The next time tension arises, ask yourself:

- Am I adding to the drama, or am I adding to the solution?
- If I bring a complaint, what three solutions could I offer?

Resources are available to support and strengthen both personal wellbeing and workplace culture.

- *SDDA Be Well program: Three free, confidential coaching or counseling sessions with me on any personal or professional topic.*
- I provide Wellbeing Workshops at dental clinics or via zoom for a one-hour overview on wellbeing strategies and the Be Well Program and benefits. CE hour approved.



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ADA Wellbeing Resources for Members: ada.org/resources/practice/wellness

Non-Licensed Persons Should be Reported

Several members have contacted the SDDA, reporting that they are aware of non-licensed individuals providing dental care to patients in South Dakota. The South Dakota State Board of Dentistry recommends that anyone with knowledge of a person without a dental license who is providing dental care in South Dakota should alert local law enforcement (the local police department or county sheriff's department) and make a report to the Division of Consumer Protection within the South Dakota Attorney General's Office. Contact information for that office is: consumerhelp@state.sd.us; (605) 773-4400 (phone); and (605) 773-7163 (fax).

Add the SDDA to your "Safe Sender List"

Don't miss out on important information from the SDDA! Please add @sddental.org to your safe sender email list to avoid the South Dakota Dental Association emails being sent to your junk/spam folders. We send a limited number of emails each month and we want you to receive the important and timely information that affects you and your practice.



YOUR VOICE MATTERS CAL ACCURACY

**HYGIENISTS,
DENTISTS, AND
PERIODONTISTS**



**Contribute to the Evidence.
Shape Best Practices.**

Survey Purpose:

You will be helping to identify discrepancies and barriers in CAL and the findings will support clinical guidelines to improve diagnostic accuracy and inter-provider consistency.

If you are a dental provider actively involved in periodontal care or education, employed in the U.S., and over 18 years old, please scan the QR code to take a 20-minute online survey about the clinical accuracy and barriers in charting and assessing for Clinical Attachment Loss (CAL).



University of South Dakota
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CONTINUING EDUCATION CALENDAR

The listing of these programs is provided as a service to SDDA Newsletter subscribers, and does not mean that these programs have been endorsed or approved by the SD Dental Association or the SD State Board of Dentistry. All members are cautioned to evaluate the programs on their own merit.

SOUTH DAKOTA DENTAL ASSOCIATION 2026 ANNUAL SESSION

May 14-16, 2026 | Sioux Falls, SD

Contact: Melissa Afdahl, 605-609-1152 | melissa@sddental.org | www.sddental.org

WESTERN DAKOTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-718-2410; email: corped@wdt.edu

Third Friday of the month (AM)

- American Heart Association CPR Class for Healthcare Professionals

Third Friday of the month (PM)

- American Heart Association CPR Recertification for Healthcare Provider

Dental Radiology (2-day course)

- October 19-20, 2025 in Rapid City

SOUTHEAST TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-367-4607 or corporateeducation@southeasttech.edu

Dental Radiology

- Dates TBD

LAKE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: Nicole Pahl, 605-882-5284, ext. 362; Nicole.Pahl@lakeareatech.edu
www.lakeareatech.edu/corporate-education/corporate-education-registration/

Home Study Radiology Courses available:

- Radiology Safety
- Radiography Production

CPR COURSES: Contact: Tia Meyer; 605-842-5672 or

meyertia@hotmail.com

605CPR: We provide AHA and/or Red Cross BLS/ACLS/PALS certification. Will travel for onsite delivery.

www.605CPR.com; jr@605CPR.com; 605-525-4CPR (4277)

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Contact: Dept. of Dental Hygiene, 605-658-5960

Local Anesthesia Certification

- June 18-20, 2026

Nitrous Oxide/Oxygen Inhalation Sedation Certification

- October 17-18, 2025 and June 4-5, 2026

Radiology Certification for Dental Assistants

- May 28-29, 2026

Home Study Courses available:

- Radiology Interpretation, Pathology & Anomalies
- Errors of PA's, BWS & Panoramic Radiography
- Oral Effects of Head & Neck Radiation Therapy
- Radiation Safety
- Portable Dental Radiography
- SDF

ADA CE ONLINE

Contact: engage.ada.org

Save the Date

Sioux Empire
Smiles
A Free
One Day
Children's
Dental Clinic

Saturday, October 4, 2025

Help children receive the dental care they deserve

Volunteers Needed & Information:

- Dentists
- Hygienists
- Assistants
- Donate 3-4 hrs. | 8:00am-Noon approx.
- Food & Drinks provided
- Children's Dental Center

Contact:
melissa@sddental.org
to volunteer
today!

Dentistry in South Dakota
804 N Euclid; Ste 103
Pierre SD 57501

Classified Ads

Dakota Family Dentistry in Huron, SD is seeking a **registered dental hygienist** to join our team. The ideal candidate should be dedicated to providing excellent patient care with exceptional service. This is an outstanding opportunity to practice in a well-established clinic with a great team in a wonderful community. Benefits include a \$5000 sign-on bonus, student loan repayment for 3 year commitment, competitive pay, 401K with profit-sharing, in-house dental benefit plan, paid sick leave, vacation, dues, licenses, CE, and 6 paid holidays. Visit our website: www.dakotafamilydentistry.org for an application or call 605-352-6999.

Dental Hygienist: Are you a dental hygienist looking to make a difference? Would you like to set your own schedule? Delta Dental of South Dakota's Mobile Program has collaborative supervision opportunities for dental hygienists. These opportunities include both—full time and part-time flexible schedules, including working specific weeks or months out of the year. The dental hygienists will work under collaborative supervision in South Dakota, primarily on the Pine Ridge or Cheyenne River Native American Reservations. The dental hygienists will join a team providing preventive services and oral health education in schools, Head Starts, etc. Extensive travel is required. May be eligible for benefits including health, dental, vision, life/long term disability insurance, paid holidays, vacation/sick leave, 401k, and more. For more information visit www.deltadentalsd.com. Submit a cover letter and resume to: summer.sporrer@deltadentalsd.com. Questions? Contact Zach Parsons at 605-494-2558.

Dentistry in South Dakota

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