



# Dentistry

## IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Allied Staff News

### Wellness in Motion: How Emotional Intelligence Strengthens Dental Teams

By Mary Wolf, MS, LPC-MH, BCC

“If you think emotional intelligence is just about being “nice”, you’ve missed the point.” In the dental environment, clinical excellence is expected but what about sustainable excellence? That requires something more. It requires Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions while effectively navigating the emotions of others. In a fast-paced clinic, where patient anxiety, production pressure, staffing challenges, and constant decision-making intersect, EQ is not a “soft skill.” It is a performance skill. *Continued on page 2*



### Understanding and Managing Vicarious Liability Risks for the Dental Team

By John Vaselaney, DDS; Director of Risk Management, The Professional Protector Plan® for Dentists



Successful dental practices operate in a team environment, with each member contributing to the practice’s goals of safely delivering outstanding care, operating efficiently, and creating patient satisfaction.

Every team needs a responsible leader, and in dentistry that’s the dentist. The law considers a dentist to be the responsible party as well. The legal concept of vicarious liability holds an employer responsible for the actions of its employees. It can also hold individuals responsible for the actions of others that work under that person’s supervision and control, even if they are not the owner.

Vicarious liability is based on a legal doctrine that is often referred to as the “captain of the ship” theory. Looking broadly at dentistry, a practice owner is the “captain” of the business and is therefore responsible for everyone’s actions: associate dentists, hygienists, dental assistants, office staff, lab technicians and any other individuals the owner employs or supervises. That means what a dental team member does or says – or sometimes what they fail to do or say – can lead to a malpractice allegation for which the dentist is responsible.

Employee dentists also have vicarious liability risk exposure. They directly supervise the dental assistants they work with, oversee the activities of hygienists, and often direct team members to perform specific tasks. If a patient is injured by the actions of a dental team member on a day the practice owner is not present, we frequently see patients allege wrongdoing – and responsibility – by both the employee dentist that supervised the practice that day as well as the owner dentist.

#### Some examples of vicarious liability that would attach liability to a dentist are:

- A dental assistant accidentally injures a patient while assisting during a clinical procedure
- A dental hygienist recommends a clinical procedure that is inappropriate and contraindicated
- A team member answers the phone and responds to a patient’s clinical question with incorrect information that leads to harm
- A business office employee submits an insurance claim for treatment that was not completed

A dentist’s vicarious liability has the potential to have a significant impact on their practice,

*Continued on page 2*

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Emotional Intelligence allows us to respond instead of react. When EQ is low, stress spreads quickly. Tension between team members lingers. Communication becomes abrupt. Leaders become reactive. Patients feel the undercurrent. When EQ is strong, something shifts. Teams communicate with clarity. Conflict is addressed earlier. Leaders create psychological safety. Stress is managed rather than absorbed. Patients feel steadiness and trust.

- “I may be wrong — here’s what I’m noticing.”
- “Let’s pause for a moment before we respond.”
- “What outcome are we aiming for here?”
- “I can feel tension building — can we reset?”
- “That didn’t land the way I intended. Let me try again.”
- “I’m feeling overwhelmed. Can we prioritize together?”
- “Before we move forward, is everyone clear?”
- “I appreciate you saying that.”
- “Can we talk about this before it builds?”
- “I need five minutes to gather my thoughts so I can respond well.”
- “What would make this a win for both of us?”
- “Thank you for bringing that up.” (*Daniel Goleman*)

### Here are practical EQ phrases that people with strong EQ say:

If you want to learn more about Emotional Intelligence, plan to attend my presentation at the annual session. I will be taking my experiences from counseling and coaching dentists and team members, to provide EQ in practical ways. We will explore the core components of Emotional Intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management.

Also, I will be available at annual session for confidential counseling and executive coaching sessions on any topic. Of course, I am available anytime to talk through a variety of topics. Here are a few topics that others are using sessions for: decision making, work relationships, anxiety, grief, parenting, change/uncertainty, and health/emotional wellbeing plans. I will be in Rapid City May 26-28 and can provide Wellbeing Workshops at your clinic or provide in-person individual counseling/coaching sessions then. If you are interested in scheduling workshops or coaching/counseling sessions, please contact me at [mwolf@veriteepartners.com](mailto:mwolf@veriteepartners.com) or 605-940-3868.

## Understanding and Managing Vicarious Liability Risks for the Dental Team

license, and career. On the other hand, dental team members are rarely named as defendants in malpractice lawsuits and are frequently covered under the employing or supervising dentist’s malpractice policy. Even so, some dental hygienists elect to have their own liability policy to protect their interests.

### The considerations for a hygienist when evaluating whether to purchase their own policy include:

- Do all the dentists you work for and with have current and active malpractice insurance policies?
- Do those dentists’ insurance policies include vicarious liability coverage? (Note: The Professional Protector Plan<sup>®</sup> for Dentists, the South Dakota Dental Association’s endorsed professional liability program, includes vicarious liability coverage in its standard policy language for dentists. Dentists should check their policy or with their agent to confirm coverage.)
- What are the policy limits of those policies? Are they adequate to protect you as well?
- Do you work outside that coverage, that is, in another office or location where an employer or supervisor dentist’s policy does not indemnify you?
- What clinical procedures are you performing and how risky are they?
- How significant are your personal or family assets? Would you potentially be considered a “deeper pocket” in a lawsuit than the dentist?

At the very least, we encourage all dental team members to verify that their dentist has an active dental license as well as an active malpractice policy that includes vicarious liability coverage.

We have recommended to dentists a number of ways to reduce their vicarious liability risk, focusing on credential verification, training, and performance management. We encourage dental team members to contribute to the risk management process by taking these steps:

- Keep your license current and provide a copy to all dentists with whom you work.
- Exhibit professional conduct at all times. Your actions and behavior contribute to patients’ opinions of the dentist and the practice.

- Be an empathetic listener and communicator, and treat patients, coworkers, and colleagues with respect.
- Comply with all dental practice act provisions. Don't overstep your licensure boundaries by performing a service or task that you're not permitted to perform.
- Comply with all office policies and procedures. They exist primarily for patient safety, risk management, and operational efficiency. If you have a better idea for a policy, make a suggestion to your employer.
- Be thorough in your chart documentation, whether it pertains to clinical care, patient conversations, or other information that impacts patients and their care.
- Participate in your employer's supervision and evaluation of your performance and follow their directives for improvement. Request ongoing feedback rather than waiting for an annual performance review.
- Participate in all required training and request training in subject areas or tasks that would make you more proficient and effective in your role. This includes training in areas such as infection control, patient privacy and HIPAA, emergency response in the office, technical skills, interpersonal skills, or other subjects.

Managing risk in dentistry, whether vicarious or otherwise, requires the cooperation of the entire dental team. A well-trained, educated, and empathetic team is one of a practice's best features and most valuable assets. The team's efforts contributing to safe, quality clinical care, patient satisfaction, and thorough documentation helps managing risk

## 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.

### WESTERN DAKOTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-718-2410; email: [corped@wdt.edu](mailto: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 Providers

### SOUTHEAST TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-367-4607 or  
[corporateeducation@southeasttech.edu](mailto:corporateeducation@southeasttech.edu)

### LAKE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: Nicole Pahl, 605-882-5284, ext. 362;  
[Nicole.Pahl@lakeareatech.edu](mailto:Nicole.Pahl@lakeareatech.edu)  
[www.lakeareatech.edu/corporate-education/corporate-education-registration/](http://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](mailto:meyertia@hotmail.com)

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

[www.605CPR.com](http://www.605CPR.com); [jr@605CPR.com](mailto: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

- 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](http://engage.ada.org)

## 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 \$10,000 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](http://www.dakotafamilydentistry.org) for an application or call 605-352-6999.

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

## Classified Ads

River Ridge Oral & Maxillofacial Surgical Center is seeking a motivated and dependable **Oral Surgery Assistant** to join our fast-paced, patient-focused practice. The ideal candidate is professional, compassionate, and detail-oriented. Responsibilities include assisting surgeons during oral and facial procedures, preparing patients and reviewing medical histories, monitoring and recovering patients following IV sedation, maintaining treatment rooms and instruments, and ensuring proper sterilization and infection control standards. Qualifications include CPR certification, high school diploma, and a dental assisting degree. DANB/DAANCE certification and prior oral surgery or dental assisting experience are preferred. Strong communication skills, reliability, and the ability to work both independently and as part of a team are essential. Familiarity with dental software is a plus. We offer competitive pay of \$25–\$29 per hour based on experience, 160 hours of PTO in the first year, paid holidays, employer-paid medical and dental coverage, and 401(k) eligibility after one year. Resumes can be submitted to [taylor@riverridgeoms.com](mailto:taylor@riverridgeoms.com).

**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](http://www.deltadentalsd.com). Submit a cover letter and resume to: [summer.sporrer@deltadentalsd.com](mailto:summer.sporrer@deltadentalsd.com). Questions? Contact Zach Parsons at 605-494-2558.

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