



MDS PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2024 MDS HOUSE OF DELEGATES

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." —John F. Kennedy

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Introduction

In the current fiscal year, the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) has focused on and is delivering more practical needs to our members. This report aims to summarize some of the work that has been done, our future aspirations, and the threats to the success of our profession. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list but rather a summary. More details can be found in other MDS publications and committee reports.

Before delving into the details, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff for their invaluable service. Without them, we would not have a functional society. I also want to recognize the Board of Trustees for their sacrifices in time and labor. Most importantly, I want to thank our committee chairs and volunteers. Never in the history of our organization have we had so many first-time chairs and committee members. The level of innovation, competency, dedication, and tenacity they have brought is unparalleled. There is a new energy that I have never experienced in my decades of service.

Successes

Hygienists and Assistants

There is a national shortage of hygienists and assistants, and the salaries for hygiene staff have become unsustainable. I authored H3880, “An Act Relative to Dental Hygienist Reciprocal Licensure,” with Representative Tackey Chan to issue a dental hygienist license to dentists who have been lawfully practicing for at least five years in another country. Every year, thousands of foreign-trained dentists apply to our advanced standing programs, and thousands more serve in non-health-related professions. The anticipated passage of this bill would immediately boost our hygiene workforce without any educational cost burdens, improving access to care, reducing care costs, and providing a better quality of life for this immigrant community. For the first time in a long while, we have successfully moved this bill through committees and had positive preliminary discussions with the leadership of the hygiene association (Dr. Frances Clairmont was instrumental).

MDS and our volunteers are also conducting robust programs to encourage students to consider careers in dental assisting, including both digital and onsite initiatives.

Medical Loss Ratio Regulations

The Question 2 ballot initiative (authored by Dr. Mouhab Rizkallah), a first in our nation, mandates insurers to spend at least 83% of their revenues on direct patient care. Despite the statutes being law, the regulations (the language determining actual compliance) were not immediately established. Within two weeks, through the leadership of the Dental Benefits

Committee and Government Affairs Committee, with staff assistance, we synthesized the proposed regulations for the insurance commissioner. Despite facing multiple adversarial opinions, MDS prevailed in the vast majority of these regulations, avoiding numerous loopholes that would have weakened the spirit and intent of our ballot initiative.

Medicaid Compensation

For years, we have advocated for higher MassHealth reimbursements with little success. This year, through the leadership of our Benefits Committee, we notified MassHealth that they were not in compliance with the “Medicaid Act,” specifically the Geographic Area Requirement. This requires that children under 21 must have equal, if not better, access to care, which entails appropriate compensation.

Additionally, committee members and I have routinely met with MassHealth leadership to discuss low adult reimbursements and member complaints about bureaucracies. Since our meetings, MassHealth has resolved numerous individual member complaints and opened a clear communication channel, marking a significant improvement from the past.

Anti-Competitive Activities by Insurers

For decades, dental insurers enjoyed a safe harbor, allowing them to collaborate and manipulate the market without violating antitrust laws. However, after years of lobbying, we successfully reversed this inequity with the passage of the Competitive Health Insurance Reform Act of 2020. Since then, there has been little follow-up. We have issued a letter to Attorney General Campbell requesting that the Massachusetts Attorney General's office begin investigating the anti-competitive behavior of dental insurers in the Commonwealth. Addressing these practices is crucial for ensuring a fairer, more competitive market that benefits both dental professionals and the public.

Health and Wellness of Our Colleagues

Dentists and hygienists are subject to disciplinary action for infractions related to mental health and addiction issues. Diversion programs exist in many health professions to remediate rather than punish, but unfortunately, not in dentistry. This needed change has been championed by Dr. Alan Budd and Dr. Jeff Lowenstein. I authored H300, “An Act Establishing a Dentist Diversion Program,” with Representative Tackey Chan. This program will serve as a voluntary alternative to traditional disciplinary actions, establish criteria for acceptance and termination, and create an outreach program to identify and educate dentists and hygienists about the rehabilitation program. For the first time in a long while, we have successfully moved this bill through committees, thanks to our Government Affairs Committee's countless interactions.

Mid-Level Providers

The Massachusetts Dental Society has changed its policy from a negotiated stance on mid-level providers to one completely against their creation. This change is due to new economic and workforce realities and better understanding between legislators and the profession. We are proud that through the hard work of our Government Affairs Committee and grassroots leaders, we have prevented the creation of mid-level providers in a state with one of the highest densities of dentists. There should not be a two-tiered health system in Massachusetts.

Yankee Dental

The Yankee Dental Congress 2024 was a tremendous success, with increased attendance thanks to the dedication of MDS staff and volunteers. The event provided numerous networking opportunities, innovative continuing education sessions, and a variety of exhibitors, highlighting Yankee as a place to innovate and showcase new products and services that improve the lives of dental professionals. The presence of tech startups offered attendees a preview of the future and opportunities to test cutting-edge technologies. Beyond business, Yankee fostered personal interactions, allowing colleagues to reconnect and reminisce.

Work In Progress

Student Loans

The cost of dental education is becoming unsustainable, discouraging graduates from serving in non-profits and areas of need. A task force led by Dr. Howard Zolot (Past MDS President) is exploring private-public partnerships in Massachusetts for student loan relief with much success.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Diversity is essential for innovation. When people from different backgrounds come together, they bring diverse perspectives and solve problems that may have previously seemed insurmountable. The MDS is proud to be the fifth state in the nation to establish a DEI committee (Chaired by Dr. Divya Upadhyay) We aspire for this committee to help shape the future of our MDS.

Evolving Projects

Dental Schools

We are having discussions and early meetings with dental school deans on how MDS could better collaborate with dental schools to bring more value to MDS members and dental students.

Early ideas include addressing food insecurities faced by dental students, recruiting faculty members, establishing a mentorship program, and increasing MDS presence at dental schools. Insurance reimbursements represent a significant portion of revenue for dental schools from their clinical care, presenting a great opportunity for collaboration with MDS on fair insurance compensations. Better reimbursements for schools may help control rising tuition rates.

Board of Registration in Dentistry (BORID)

We recently learned that the licensure process at BORID may take 8-10 weeks, posing a significant hardship for new graduates and practices. We aspire to study and develop better feedback relationships with the Board of Registration on these and other matters.

Dental Assistants

The licensure of dental assistants has posed tremendous challenges to the available workforce. We are looking into reducing bureaucracies to potentially streamline the process for dental assistants. We are in the ideation phase of this consideration.

Access and Prevention

The health of the public is paramount to the mission and vision of the dental society. Recently, a task force chaired by Dr. John Fisher (Past MDS President), a national advocate and leader in fluoridation, was formed to create better collaborations and outcomes in health for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Conclusion

The Massachusetts Dental Society has made tremendous strides in serving its members and the citizens of the Commonwealth this year. Our work addresses the current and practical needs of practicing dentists. The MDS aspires to do more and become an even more effective organization. We have achieved so much this year by embracing non-traditional leaders and recruiting new members into decision-making processes and committees. These individuals are energetic, dedicated, and ambitious.

However, there are threats to the society, the greatest being member apathy. If members lose interest because they feel the society is moving away from their practical needs, the society risks becoming irrelevant. To continue delivering value, leadership must commit to transparency, active listening, and responsible allocation of resources. Politics and infighting have no place in an effective society. We must eliminate wasteful activities to remain efficient and relevant. The fair and equal application of rules to all leaders and members is essential for maintaining our integrity.

Our success is measured by the percentage of Massachusetts dentists who are our members. At a recent MDS Leadership Institute graduation dinner, I witnessed the promising future of our

society. These individuals, hailing from various states and countries, speak over 15 different languages and possess diverse backgrounds. Despite their differences, they share a common goal: to lead fulfilling personal and professional lives in a career dedicated to doing good. Our recent achievements have inspired them to pursue leadership roles. We have a duty to support their aspirations and improve the lives of all our members and non-members. Additionally, we must uphold our position as the most trusted voice in oral health. It has been my greatest honor and privilege to serve you. I am grateful for your trust in me, our staff, and the non-traditional team I have brought forth to drive change in our society.