Dentistry in U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

Dr. Justin Vos had graduated from University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry in 2007 and was working as an associate when he read a story about a dentist working for the Indian Health Service in Michigan’s remote Upper Peninsula region. “I went to dental school because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of people. And what I found was I was spending a lot of time doing practice management tasks, thinking about advertising and so forth. So I reached out to that dentist, which is how I learned about the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.” The U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps are uniformed dental officers, serving in the Indian Health Service (IHS), U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Bureau of Prisons and the National Health Service Corps. While their uniforms are derived from those of the U.S. Navy, the Commissioned Corps is under the Department of Health and Human Services, overseen by the U.S. Surgeon General, rather than under the Department of Defense. While the Commissioned Corps is not an armed service, officers may have the opportunity to assist in public health responses to man-made and natural disasters. Officers receive the same benefits as their counterparts in the military.

“I talked with my wife,” Dr. Vos remembers, “and she vetoed the idea of someplace geographically isolated, so I broadened my search.” Today Dr. Vos is a Lieutenant Commander in the corps, practicing dentistry at a correctional facility in North Carolina. Geography was an important consideration for Dr. Gabrielle Hung. “I grew up in Seattle and did both undergrad and dental school at University of Washington. After finishing dental school and completing my obligation with the Air Force, I was looking for an opportunity close to home, which is how I ended up at this duty station serving the Coast Guard in Seattle.”

While some officers come to the Commissioned Corps after exploring other paths in dentistry, others know even before dental school. “As a child, my grandmother went to Indian Health Services,” remembers Dr. Scott Williams. “Later on, during my undergraduate education, I did internships with the IHS, so I knew that was where I wanted my career to go after dental school.”

Dr. Williams notes that there are many misconceptions about the day-to-day experiences of dentists in the Commissioned Corps. “Certainly we do extractions and emergency care, but we do a wide range of procedures — I’m one of four general dentists on a staff that includes a pediatric dentist, an oral surgeon and two hygienists.” “For the most part I serve a population that has low oral-health literacy and little access to dental care,” observes Dr. Vos. “There is a lot of advanced disease processes. I do a lot of nuts and bolts dentistry, some endo, a lot of removable prosthetics.”

“My schedule is about 90% patient care, with the remaining 10% working on administrative duties that help ensure our facility is running smoothly and in accordance with our guidelines,” Dr. Hung explains. “When I’m at work, I work very hard, but my quality of life is very good because my job allows me to keep a healthy balance between work and personal life.”

“We work a Monday–Friday schedule, with 30 paid days of leave per year, plus all the major Federal holidays,” adds Dr. Vos. “And there are some very nice benefits. For instance,

Continued on next page...
FQHCs and Dental Student Loan Repayment

An FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center) is part of the dental safety net—these centers serve locations or populations with limited access to care. They may be located in urban or rural areas. An FQHC is often an integrated healthcare facility, where a patient has a single chart encompassing all care, including medical, dental and behavioral health.

Some dentists work full-time at an FQHC, while others devote part of their schedules to working for one of these centers. "It makes sense for new dentists to consider FQHCs whether you are recently graduated from dental school or you already have years of practice under your belt," notes Dr. Rex Yanase, thirteenth district representative to the ADA New Dentist Committee, and non-voting ex officio member of the ADA Council on Access, Prevention and Intraprofessional Relations. "In addition to providing a piece of the access-to-care puzzle, working for an FQHC can provide loan repayment opportunities."

Loan repayment is available for a combined commitment that includes both a minimum number of 20 hours per week, and a minimum number of years of service. For more information, see www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/index.html.

Many health centers are highly competitive and your experience can make a difference when multiple candidates are vying for limited opportunities. To locate an FQHC opportunity, first visit the National Health Services Corps website nhsc.hrsa.gov and choose the jobs center link.

In addition to narrowing your search to dentistry positions, you’ll see that opportunities are identified by a HPSA score. HPSA (say “Hip-suh”) designates Health Professional Shortage Area. The HPSA score usually is associated with a specific geographic location, but FQHCs do have a HPSA score simply due to their designation as an FQHC. The higher the HPSA score, the greater the challenges of access to care in this area. For dentistry, a HPSA score can range from 0–26. Note that there are three different varieties of HPSA scores, which are primary care (medical), dental and behavioral health.

The HPSA number matters if you plan to apply for loan repayment funds. HPSA scores allow governments to prioritize distribution of funding, and these funds are often directed towards the areas of greatest need, which is to say the highest HPSA score.

The contract for employment with an FQHC is negotiated separately from the contract for loan repayment. For FQHCs, you can't apply for loan repayment without having first contracted for employment.

The National Health Services Corps website nhsc.hrsa.gov offers a loan repayment estimate calculator where you can propose numerous variables, including full-time or part-time employment, years–of–commitment, and whether the HPSA score is above or below fourteen. There are also descriptions of state and community loan repayment options.

ADA Center for Professional Success

The ADA Center for Professional Success at Success.ADA.org, is a one-stop shop for dentists seeking resources that will help them succeed as dental practitioners and find solutions to professional and personal challenges. The website includes everything from tips for choosing a career path to balancing personal and professional lives to patient communication strategies.

Check out the Ask the ADA feature to ask practice management and wellness questions to ADA staff along with all the other great features at Success.ADA.org.
The Value of ADA Membership for New Dentists

ADA New Dentist News sat down with the chair of the ADA New Dentist Committee to talk about the value of membership for new dentists — those ten years or fewer out of dental school.

ADA New Dentist News

Let’s start with a simple question; why single out new dentists? Isn’t ADA membership valuable for every dentist?

Dr. Brian Schwab

Oh sure. And there are so many benefits, such as ADA Member’s Insurance Plans, that are valuable for dentists at every career stage. But I think it’s especially critical for new dentists to be members.

I was looking at some numbers… did you know the average dental student debt back in 1990 was about $55,000? (editor’s note: According to the Annual ADEA Survey of Dental School Seniors, the class of 1990 had an average debt of $54,550.) Can you imagine? Even if you adjust that for inflation, you don’t reach six figures. So at that basic, pocketbook level, new dentists face different challenges from previous generations.

And the ADA understands that, which is why the Reduced Dues Program is so important. So, if you earned your D.D.S. or D.M.D. in 2013, then your first year is 2014 and you pay zero dues at the national level. Most state and local dental societies match the national rate. Then your second year out of school you pay 25% at the national level, the third year is 50%, and it keeps going until you are five years out and paying 100%. But you need to maintain continuous membership. And if you go into a specialty or residency program you can join as a graduate student member for $30 and that preserves your eligibility for reduced dues.

ADA NDN

What makes ADA membership valuable for new dentists?

Dr. Brian Schwab

Here’s a real world example. Say you are considering signing a contract to become a provider for an insurance company. Do you fully understand this legal document, including all the potential benefits and pitfalls? The ADA offers a contract analysis service where you can submit an unsigned contract and get a plain-language analysis of the business. Again, absolutely free but only to ADA members.

ADA NDN

What about the clinical side of dentistry?

Dr. Brian Schwab

There’s JADA of course, with searchable archives online, and the Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry. I think these resources are especially helpful when discussing treatment planning with patients since the ADA name is so well-respected by the public. They see the green ADA sticker on the front door and it helps reassure them that they’ve chosen wisely when selecting a dentist.

ADA NDN

We’ve talked about tools to help new dentists succeed, and ways that ADA can help members be better dentists. Anything else?

Dr. Brian Schwab

As dentists we have to stand up for ourselves, and that means standing together. My practice is in Pennsylvania and every year I participate in our lobby day where hundreds of dentists and dental students come to Harrisburg, the state capital, to show our strength. There really is strength in numbers, and the ADA represents over 158,000 of us. That is huge! There aren’t a lot of professions with those numbers. But the flip side of that is that the numbers don’t just happen, our strength comes from our membership, which means individual dentists joining and renewing membership, one by one.

As a new dentist I want those numbers to be strong today, and I want them to be strong going forward because I’m planning on having a long career (laughs.) Protecting the future of my profession—that is probably the most valuable thing of all!
Registration is Open for 28th New Dentist Conference

For Dr. Michael LeBlanc, a pediatric dentist practicing in the Greater Kansas City area, attending the annual New Dentist Conference is a summertime priority. “I always come away more informed by the continuing education, and energized by the interactions with my peers from across the country,” explains Dr. LeBlanc who represents the twelfth district on the ADA New Dentist Committee, where he also serves as vice-chair. “And this year it’s practically in my back yard — everyone is about to find out what makes Kansas City so special!”

The 28th New Dentist Conference takes place in Kansas City, Missouri this July 17-19 at the Sheraton Kansas City Hotel at Crown Center. Registration is open at ADA.org/newdentistconf. The three-day conference includes sessions on clinical topics as well as practice management, and effective communication. Lunches and special events are included and conference attendees enjoy a discount when booking rooms at the host hotel.

The leadership programming gets underway Thursday, July 17 with presentations on getting involved to position yourself at the ADA New Dentist Committee and the Board of Trustees. Wondering what to wear to the reception? Attire for the conference, including all courses, programming, meals and entertainment is business casual.

Friday and Saturday are both filled with continuing education courses—the three day conference offers up to 14 hours of CE credit. Topics range from clinical diagnosis to practice management systems. And for a small additional fee, hands-on endo and implant courses at University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry.

Kansas City knows how to have a good time — see for yourself at the Friday Night Event at PBR Big Sky where cowboy cool meets urban chic. Enjoy country and southern rock, great food and a chance to ride the mechanical bull. And when the party’s over, the good times are just getting started with live music outdoors on the full-concert stage and over 50 restaurants, bars, shops and night spots in the famous Power and Light District. There’s something for everyone. Tickets are complimentary to registered attendees. Guests of all ages are invited to attend the Friday Night Event—a limited number of tickets for are available on a first-come, first-served basis for $75 per guest.

Saturday’s schedule holds another full day of CE and networking. The day also includes an awards luncheon recognizing outstanding commitment to organized dentistry.

Advance registration for the conference is $375 for dentist members. Not a member? Visit ADA.org/join. Advance registration is $275 for ADA Federal Dentist Service members, as well as for ADA student and graduate student members. Register before noon on May 23, 2014 and be entered in the Early-Bird Registration Sweepstakes. Visit ADA.org/newdentistconf to register for the conference, to find information on travel and hotel reservations, see the prizes that will be awarded to those participating in Early-Bird Registration, and to select the CE courses you want to attend. Questions? 312.440.2779 or newdentist@ada.org.

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