Getting to Know You

Dr. Drew Vanderbrook is in general practice in Dallas.

Why Dentistry?
I love the balance of art and science and being able to foster long-term relationships with my patients.

Why are you an ADA member?
I'm an ADA member because I feel it is important to be part of a unified voice that supports the advancement of our profession.

What has been the best time of your career so far?
I really love the fulfillment I get from completing dental cases that have made a positive impact on someone's life.

When I'm not practicing, I'm:
Spending time with my family and 18-month-old daughter. I also love watching college sports. Gig 'em Aggies!

One fun fact about me:
I grew up in the New Orleans area and head back each year to ride in a Mardi Gras parade with my brothers.

For practice durability, listen to your body

Most days of the week, Dr. Katie Sowa wakes up at 4:45 a.m. to break a sweat, either doing CrossFit or yoga, before heading to work. If she's training for a half marathon, she gets her runs in before dinner or in the morning.

“Staying active and fit will help the longevity of your career,” said Dr. Sowa, a general dentist in a large group practice in Katy, Texas.

But exercising isn’t the only way she’s ensuring a long and healthy career.

“I think about ergonomics every day at work,” she said. “I hope to be practicing for a long time. And anything I can do to avoid having to use my disability insurance, I’ll do that.”

Because of the physical demands of work tasks, workstation layout issues and equipment used, dental professionals deal with a variety of job factors that can be associated with musculoskeletal disorders, such as pain in the neck, back, wrist and hands, according to the ADA Center for Professional Success.

For Dr. Sowa, the most awkward movement for her body is when she’s working with the top-left side of a patient’s mouth. “I have to move my body to accommodate my patient,” she said. “Most of the time it affects my neck and shoulders.”

Those with chronic pain should seek advice from their family physician or physical therapist. However, easy stretches and working with more appropriate equipment and tools can help prevent fatigue and provide relief for the simple aches and pains that can occur during the working day.

According to the ADA Center for Professional Success, maintaining proper posture and making sure your operator chair is at the right height can provide balance to the spine.

Ergonomic tips to help you stay healthy

If your muscles are sore at the end of the day — even though you’re a young new dentist or dental student — you’re not alone.

According to the ADA Center for Professional Success, 40 to 60 percent of dental professionals suffer from work-related musculoskeletal issues. Here are some of the painful predicaments inherent in hands-on dentistry and easy in-office stretches to keep you and your staff healthy.

**Neck pain**
To avoid some neck pain, when possible, sit up straight and keep your feet flat on the floor. In addition, check for the correct focal length and declination angle on your loupe. If the focal length is not adequate or the declination angle is not enough, it forces you to drop your head into a poorly balanced position.

**Neck-shoulder stretches**
Simple stretches throughout the day are important. Try intertwining your fingers together behind your head and bringing your elbows forward and back; turning your head from the right, to the left, to the right again; and retracting and protracting your neck.

**Back pain**
Dental professionals are especially susceptible to back pain because of prolonged sitting, awkward postures and sustained muscular contractions. You should seek medical attention if the pain has gone from an acute episode to more of a chronic situation, or a progression of symptoms from your back or your neck into an extremity.

**Back stretches**
Again, simple stretches throughout the day should be done, including intertwining your fingers behind your head, bringing your elbows forward and then looking up and pointing your elbows toward the sky; bringing your knees apart and leaning forward toward the floor; keeping hands...
LISTEN, continued.

"When something doesn’t feel comfortable, it helps me to just step back and readjust myself," Dr. Sorva said. Stretching throughout the day can also help. For shoulder or upper back discomfort, clasp your fingers behind your neck and direct your elbows forward. Lean back against the back of your chair while lifting your elbows up and forward, look up until you feel some pulling or stretching in your mid back; rest and repeat. For feet and ankles, move your foot up and down, side to side; and make circles clockwise and counterclockwise. The same goes with the wrists.

Dr. Sheri Doniger, past president of the American Association of Women Dentists, said her favorite stretch is called “the bandit.” “Put your back against the wall and lift up your arms as if you were being robbed,” she said. “That helps straighten your spine.” Along with stretches throughout the day, Dr. Doniger said dentists should make sure they’re using dental tools and equipment that are functional and comfortable.

This is particularly true for female new dentists. Dr. Doniger said much of the dental equipment available is largely designed for male dentists who are often larger and taller.

Dr. Elizabeth Ramos, AADW director of public relations, said she joined a practice 10 years ago with male colleagues who were all 10-11 inches taller than her. The existing stools and operator chairs were awkward. They didn’t provide her proper back support and lacked appropriate adjustability.

With hand equipment, including syringes, it’s often a struggle for dentists with smaller hands. Bulkier, bigger or heavier dental instruments can provide additional stress on the hands and wrists. “These are challenges for dentists with smaller frames,” Dr. Ramos said.

However, with women making up about half of dental students today — up from only 1.1 percent in 1968 — dental equipment manufacturers are beginning to realize there’s a market to produce tools and equipment for dentists with smaller frames — men or women.

AAWD members and leaders have engaged these dental manufacturers and suppliers in recent years through involvement with Dental Trade Association meetings. Companies have invited members to provide input on design and evaluate new products. And every year, during their AAWD annual meeting, they recognize a “Best New Product” for the female dentist. In 2015, it was a doctor’s stool that could be adjusted in several dimensions, including height and tilt.

“It’s not about making something pink,” Dr. Doniger said. “Manufacturers would be wise to seek out women’s advisory groups to find out what we need.”

It’s also important for new dentists, Dr. Doniger said, to try new dental equipment showcased at dental meeting exhibit halls. “Even among women, one size doesn’t fit all,” she said. In any case, maintaining good ergonomic health doesn’t have to be compensated.

“Exercise, practicing good posture, stretching in between patients,” said Dr. Ramos. “These ideas need to be taught early on in dental school.”

“Everyone needs to listen to his or her body,” Dr. Doniger added.

For more tips on ergonomics and dental care, visit Success. ADA.org and search “ergonomics.”

HEALTHY, continued

on your chest and rotating from the left to the right, and slouching and arching your back.

Arm pain and stretches Discomfort or tenderness in your forearm near your elbow may be the beginning of some irritation of your wrist and hand extensor muscles. This could be a precursor to a more problematic condition such as tendinitis. Stretches include touching your palm to your shoulder, and simulating the so-called “touchdown” signal that NFL referees make after a touchdown — in other words, raising both straight arms into the air.

Hand pain and stretches If hand pain is bothering you, use fitted gloves, rather than ambidextrous gloves; alternate between thicker and thinner handled instruments; use powered instruments with proper propy angles; and take short stretch breaks between patients. Stretches include turning palms up, and then down, and wiggling your fingers and shaking your hands.

Leg and foot pain and stretches In between patients, you can stretch your leg and foot muscles while sitting in your chair. Some exercises include marching in place, spreading your knees back and forth; straightening your leg, and then bending your knees; and rotating your ankles while your leg is out in front of you. These exercises are not meant as a substitute for medical evaluation from a trained physician.

To watch videos of the stretches, go to the ADA Center for Professional Success’ website at Success. ADA.org and search for “Ergo Tips.”

Learn about ER referral programs

Every 15 seconds someone, somewhere visits an emergency room for a dental-related problem.

The majority of these patients are suffering from dental decay. Eighty percent of those visits are due to preventable conditions. In 2014, the ADA launched Action for Dental Health, a nationwide, community-based movement aimed at ending the dental health crisis facing America today. One of the program’s primary goals is to reduce the number of people who visit the emergency room for dental conditions by referring them to community health centers or private dental practices, where they can receive proper dental care.

To cut down on these emergency room visits, dentists across the country are collaborating with hospitals in unique ways to refer these patients to offices and clinics. The hope is that by avoiding the emergency room patients will receive appropriate and effective treatment that is significantly less expensive than that available in a hospital.

ER alternatives include programs working with dental schools, health centers and private practices. For more information about ER referral programs and the ADA’s Action for Dental Health, visit ADA.org/action.

There you will find specific examples of the types of programs available as well as a 10-step guide and video for tips for starting your own program.
Stress relief strategies for the new dentist

Between finding a job, handling student debt loads and then managing a practice or learning the ropes as a staff dentist, new dentists can face an ocean of stress. Dr. Adam Shisler, a pediatric dentist in Houston, the “No. 1 stressor” is repaying dental student debt and facing down other financial decisions “that will set myself and my family up for long term stability and success,” he said.

Dr. Tricia Quartey, who started a solo practice in Brooklyn after finishing a residency, said the tension she feels often relates to her patients’ welfare (Will that crown fall off? Will he or she experience pain?) and staff issues (Will someone call in sick today? Will everyone get along?)

For Dr. Drew Byrnes, a University of Florida College of Dentistry graduate, stress came in the form of starting his career as an associate. There were times he had to navigate conflicts with his employer, he said. “We would sometimes disagree on the best way to treat patients,” he said.

Dr. Byrnes, who now runs his own practice in Winter Park, Florida, said the career transition introduced new stressors, including paperwork, billing and marketing of his practice, which he took over from a dentist who wanted to retire.

“Running the business side of things is an area they do not spend much time on in dental school — there is already enough to learn in dental school about dentistry,” Dr. Byrnes said.

The ADA Center for Professional Success is one resource new dentists can use to find expert information and advice regarding dental practice management. The website also offers resources on mental health, featuring interviews and tips from experts on mental health, including how to recognize the physical and mental impact of stress and how to manage negative stress, general well being in the dental profession, and how to reduce stress, among other topics. Furthermore, the ADA provides information on dental student loan repayment programs and resources that offer student loan repayment assistance. To learn more, visit ADA.org/student.

Dr. Shisler was able to refinance his student loans through an offer with the Texas Dental Association. The ADA last year announced an exclusive offer through Darien Rowayton Bank. To learn more about that offer, visit student.drbank.com/ADA.

Dr. Quartey said the challenges of day-to-day dentistry come into context when she surrounds herself with friends. “I try to live in the moment and not worry about things I can’t change,” said Dr. Quartey, who graduated from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, adding that she turns to friends to whom she can “vent” frustrations. She also spends a lot of her free time running or taking dance classes to burn off steam.

Dr. Byrnes also said that exercise, and especially running, is a way he copes with feelings. In March, he ran a marathon. “Running marathons is not for everyone (it is only for the crazy ones, like me),” Dr. Byrnes joked, “but try to find something that gives you peace and reduces stress in your life.”

And don’t forget the value and power of social support, new dentists said. Dr. Byrnes turned to other dentists, mentors and dental podcasts to help him navigate answers to business questions he had when he first opened his practice, he said. The same goes for Dr. Shisler, who said finding a reliable mentor has been crucial to his professional success. “Sometimes you feel like you’re isolated. You’re the only who’s ever failed on some sort of filling or crown,” said Dr. Shisler. “Many people have the same challenges. Experienced dentists can help offer some perspective on that from someone who’s been there.”

Dr. Shisler said he encourages new dentists who lack mentorship try attending a local study group or other event associated with their local or state dental association to meet others. “It can prevent a lot of issues,” Dr. Shisler said of turning to friends, family or other dentists for support. “It gives you that external magnifying glass; you’re not the only one who’s ever had these challenges. In the end, you’ll be OK.”

For more information about ADA resources regarding mental or physical health issues, email Alison Bramhall, ADA manager of dentist health and wellness, at bramhall@ada.org.
West Virginia dentist giving more kids a reason to smile

Growing up in rural southern West Virginia, Dr. Hillary Homburg saw first hand the health disparity among the residents.

After graduating from the West Virginia University School of Dentistry in 2009 and completing a general practice residency at The Ohio State University in 2010, Dr. Homburg moved back to her hometown of Charleston, West Virginia. Because she felt she could fill a need, she joined Cabin Creek Health Systems, a federally qualified health center, to develop a dental program in Clendenin, a town of around 1,200 people.

And she didn’t stop there. Dr. Homburg has participated in Give Kids A Smile since she was in dental school and once she returned to West Virginia, she participated in the Kanawha Valley Dental Society’s GKAS program. Her involvement sparked her to apply for the ADA Foundation Give Kids A Smile Community Leadership Development Institute in St. Louis in 2015.

Dr. Homburg’s involvement has fueled her to keep giving, expanding and enhancing a Give Kids A Smile program, in part by attending and helping facilitate one of the country’s largest GKAS events in St. Louis.

“I left the Give Kids A Smile Institute with a renewed sense of energy for the program and a lot of ideas for more community involvement and the need to request promotional help from the print and visual media,” Dr. Homburg said.

She and other volunteers visited after school programs in her area, including the Boys & Girls Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters program, to talk to their leaders about the GKAS event. They left fliers for the children to take home to their parents and promoted the event on social media.

It paid off: the turnout for the event doubled over the previous year, she said. “Attending the institute made me very proud of our program here in the Kanawha Valley. We provide comprehensive care to a large number of children yearly with a limited budget and only volunteers,” Dr. Homburg said. “We do this because in West Virginia, we step up to do what needs to be done regardless of funds.”

Dr. Homburg is continuing her work with Give Kids A Smile on a national level by participating in an Ambassador Alumni task force group, which aims to create resources program coordinators nationwide can access.

The GKAS Institute may have refined Dr. Homburg’s volunteering and coordinating skills, but she’s been a fixture in the community for awhile.

For the past five years, she has been the only dentist in Cabin Creek Health Systems, providing dental services for children and adults on an income-based sliding fee scale. During this time, the program has grown from a portable dental unit to a full dental clinic, with plans to open a second clinic next year.

In 2011, she was named Outstanding Rural Health Provider of the Year by the West Virginia Rural Health Association. “I became a dentist with the goal of working in public health and providing education and treatment to the underserved,” said Dr. Homburg. “For me it was a very natural step to come back to the area where I was from and give back as much as possible.”

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