



# Certified Press

Dental Assisting National Board, Inc.

Summer 2020 Digital Issue



## **‘WE KEEP GOING’ Dental assistants’ resilience during COVID-19**

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## CERTIFICANTS, WE THANK YOU AND SUPPORT YOU



Dear DANB certificants,

Over the past few months, COVID-19 has drastically impacted how dental assistants work and study nationwide.

With widespread temporary dental office closures — amid stay-at-home orders and social-distancing recommendations from government and health officials — came reduced workloads, layoffs and furloughs for so many, including dental assistants. Only recently are most dental professionals beginning to return to work.

Likewise, dental assisting educators and students have been significantly affected by COVID-19 — with most dental assisting educational programs transitioning to online learning through the spring and many into the summer and fall.

At DANB and the DALE Foundation, we recognize the many challenges that dental professionals, including DANB certificants, have endured.

During this time, we have been proud of your efforts to maintain DANB certification and pursue continuing dental education, despite the hardships you may have faced. Your commitment to ongoing learning — especially in the critical area of dental infection prevention and control — to ensure the delivery of the greatest patient care is commendable now more than ever.

Please know that we at DANB and the DALE Foundation remain steadfast in our efforts to continue supporting your career during this time.

Thank you for maintaining certification with DANB, especially during these challenging times. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any of your comments, questions and/or concerns. We're pleased to assist you in any way that we can. After all, we're in this together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia C. Durley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cynthia C. Durley, M.Ed., MBA  
Executive Director, DANB and the DALE Foundation

# News and Updates



DANB and DALE Foundation staff extend their thanks to DANB certificants.

## WORD FROM THE CHAIR



Michael Conte, D.M.D., M.P.H.  
Chair, DANB Board of Directors

I hope everyone has been staying safe and healthy.

COVID-19 has brought many changes for us all. Whether you've been working with patients or you have been at home during this time, I hope your experience has been manageable, and that you have been able to find moments of peace and positivity in times of stress.

This issue, we've spoken to dental assistants affected by COVID-19 in a variety of ways.

On pages 10 and 11, dental assisting educators discuss making transitions to virtual learning, as well as utilizing online DALE Foundation materials to support at-home study.

On pages 6 and 7, dental assistants share their experiences from the "front lines," which in some cases involves helping to screen patients for COVID-19 in parking lots. We recognize that delivering patient care during the pandemic has been uniquely challenging for dental teams. We commend your bravery and resilience.

On pages 12 and 13, we heard from dental professionals who stepped up to address a nationwide supply shortage in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, donating masks and other items for essential workers when personal protective equipment was needed most.

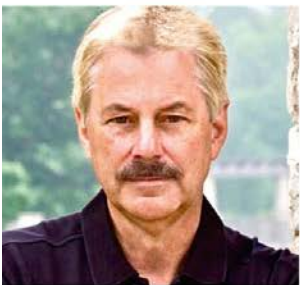
All your efforts are extraordinary, and we know these stories are just a snapshot of what dental assistants have experienced. We encourage you to continue reaching out to us. What is your story? By staying connected during these unprecedented times of change, dental assistants can learn from and inspire one another, and persevere together.

Please contact us at [communications@danb.org](mailto:communications@danb.org) with your comments and questions. We're happy to hear from you and help as we can.

Take care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Conte". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.



## DANB CERTIFICANTS STEP UP AS ‘FRONT LINE’ HEROES

For Doreen Denisty, CDA, a dental assisting supervisor with the Indian Health Service (IHS), her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic has been unlike any other she’s seen in her 48 years in the dental profession.

“Working years ago during [the early days of] AIDS/HIV was scary, but that was nothing like this,” she says. “These definitely have been trying times.”

As federal employees — with their main dental clinic located inside a hospital — Denisty and her staff are among the many dental professionals nationwide who continued working to support emergency care.

Similarly, Catherine Tilford, CDA, worked with emergency patients in an IHS clinic, during what she agrees has been one of the most challenging times of her 13-year assisting career. Tilford and her colleagues found themselves fulfilling new-normal tasks such as helping to screen patients waiting in their cars and delivering medication to them in the parking lot to promote social distancing.



“Our dental team was on the front lines every day, trying to keep our patients and providers safe.”

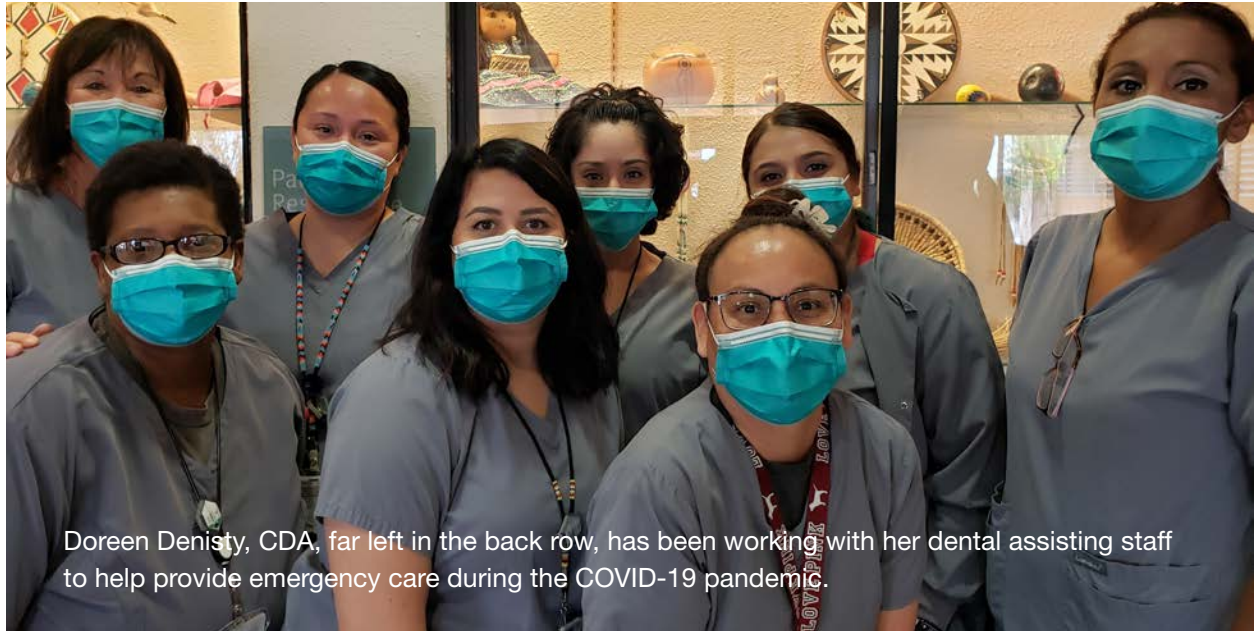
— Catherine Tilford, CDA

“Our dental team was on the front lines every day, trying to keep our patients and providers safe,” she says.

Tilford had “no problem being on the front” during this unique time of need, she adds. “And, I can honestly say, neither did my co-workers. We are healthcare providers, just doing what needed and is still needing to be done.”

Denisty and her staff have had similar recent experiences. Her Arizona facility, with four clinic sites, provided only essential care during the spring, with plans to provide nonessential care in the summer.

During the first phase, dental practices implemented heightened precautions and social distancing. For example, like Tilford, dental assistants help to screen patients for COVID-19



Doreen Denisty, CDA, far left in the back row, has been working with her dental assisting staff to help provide emergency care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

symptoms in the parking lot and taking their temperatures before dentists visit them carside to assess their level of emergency.

Aside from social-distancing concerns, the team has faced other hurdles as well. Denisty described a dwindled supply of personal protective equipment (masks, specifically) available to the team early on, adding that this is no longer an issue for their facility. She also spoke of increased concern of exposure among both patients and her staff — since their main dental clinic is in a hospital where some COVID-19 patients have been admitted.

With this ever-present fear of possible infection, Denisty admits that keeping morale up among her team of eight dental assistants has been a top challenge.

“Outside of work, and on social media, the team hears all these things — of cases in our community, about those patients in our hospital. It can be exaggerated, get big,” Denisty explains. “Hearing things, you can get down. Concern and fear can set in, and I don’t blame my staff for feeling this way.”

Denisty believes in times of uncertainty, knowledge is power, and this is especially true in the face of COVID-19. “Every morning, our team has a huddle. We’ll talk about what’s going on and focus on the facts. We talk about what we need to do to keep ourselves and our patients safe. We keep going.”

Denisty proudly notes that her team has not just persisted, but thrived, coming together to demonstrate impressive resilience.

“I can honestly say my staff has been amazing,” she elaborated. “They are here and ready to perform their duties as assigned. There have been no complaints. We’re a pretty big, close family here, and this is their community. ‘Be proud of what you’re doing,’ I tell them.

“There is just something about a dental assistant,” Denisty continues. “Like all the other dental and medical professionals on the front lines, they are always ready to help.”

## CELEBRATING TEAM UNITY DURING DARW

During March 1-7, dental teams and schools across the country observed Dental Assistants Recognition Week (DARW), as designated by the American Dental Assistants Association. DANB extends a sincere thank you to those who submitted photos from their festivities.

The theme for this year's DARW, "A 20/20 Dental Assistant — Looking Toward the Future," may have held unique, timely significance.

The first week of March, dental teams, educators and students celebrated the important work that dental assistants do each day in the dental office — including in the critical area of infection control.

As DARW celebrations were underway, few would have anticipated that come mid-March, most dental offices would temporarily close and many dental assisting educational programs would shift to online learning due to COVID-19.

Now, with most dental professionals back to work in the dental office, it's especially important to continue recognizing dental team unity. Dental professionals, we continue to appreciate you, as we did during DARW. Now more than ever.



The dental assisting students at West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) celebrated DARW by recognizing clinical site dental assistants with thank-you cards and sweet treats such as chocolate-covered pretzels, as well as lunch and popcorn. The faculty at WKCTC also surprised students with brunch to kick off the week.

# News and Updates



Emily Kate Bowen, D.D.S., CDA, dental assistant program director at Mountain Empire Community College, submitted this photo of DARW festivities held at the college. "During DARW, students also celebrated International HPV Awareness Day, March 4. Students did a research project on the virus; specifically, its link to oropharyngeal cancers," she writes. "Our future dental assistants distributed immunization information from the Virginia Immunization Coalition and handed out teal ribbons on campus to help raise awareness of this health topic."



Southeastern Technical Institute in South Easton, Massachusetts, celebrated DARW with daily surprises for dental assisting students, including sweet treats and gifts. The school also recognized students on its website and social media page. Sister programs like medical assisting also shared thoughtful gifts with dental assistants.

## EDUCATORS ADAPT TO DISTANCE LEARNING

“The dog ate my homework.” All educators can probably recall a time in their career when they heard a statement like this from a student.

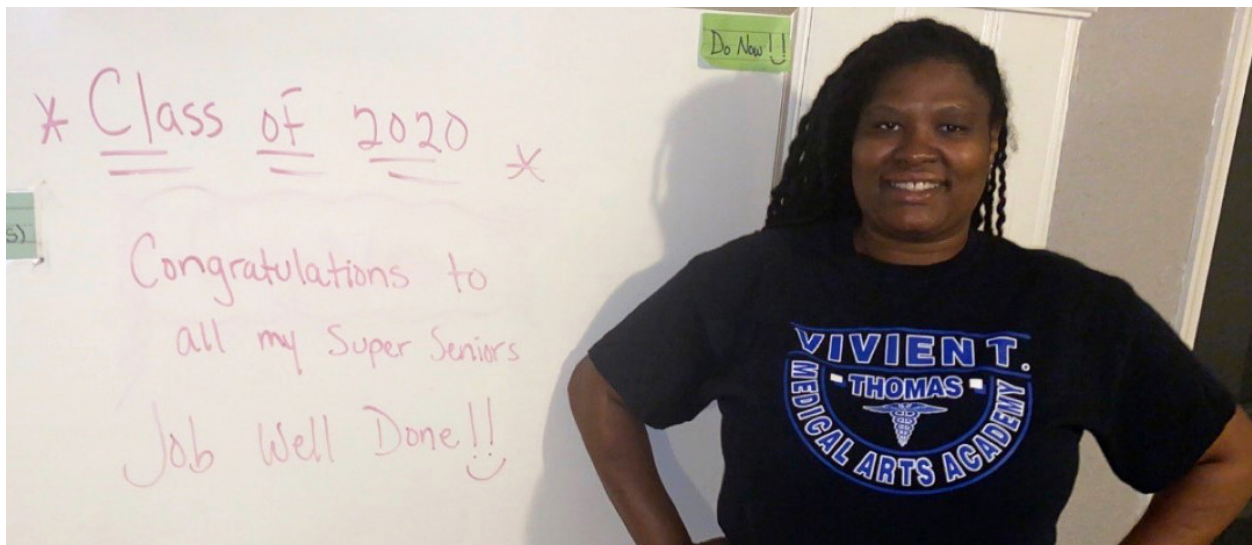
Now that COVID-19 has prompted educational programs to move out of the classroom and toward distance learning, another phrase is becoming common among students: “I overslept for my video conference call.”

At least this has been the case for students of Yinka Bryant, CDA, dental assisting program director at Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy in Baltimore, Maryland.

Although most of her students are staying motivated at home, Bryant occasionally has had to address telecommuting tardiness in recent months. “I’ll tell them, ‘You guys are complaining about waking up at 9:15 a.m., when school used to start at 7:50 when we were in session!’” she says with a laugh, adding, “We’re all still getting comfortable with what’s going on right now.”

While Bryant and her students had used a web-based learning tool before COVID-19 became widespread, video conferencing is now taking a prominent role in her lessons for her dental assisting students, who are high school juniors and seniors.

Bryant is not alone in making technological adaptations to traditional classroom learning, following calls for social distancing from government and health officials.



Dental assisting educator Yinka Bryant, CDA, and her students have been adapting during the COVID-19 pandemic by video conferencing.

# Spotlight on Excellence

Shannon Stiffler, RDH, M.S., dental assisting instructor at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland, and her students have been using an online learning management platform more now that school is held online. They're learning the technology together as they go, she says.

"Online learning pushes people out of their comfort zone, myself included," Stiffler elaborates.

Tracy Brasier, CDA, dental health careers instructor at Bucks County Technical High School in Pennsylvania, agrees that with distance learning comes the challenge of identifying which students may be struggling with material. "Unless a student speaks out, I can't tell," she shares.

While Brasier's students already were familiar with online textbooks and other web-based learning tools, they've encountered other challenges at home, such as internet connectivity interruptions. "I'm not really sure if that can be helped, though," Brasier admits. "When the whole world is using the internet at once, that's going to happen."



Tracy Brasier, CDA

Additionally, Brasier believes her students now have more distractions, as they may be juggling work and home responsibilities along with school tasks.

For Bryant, the transition to online learning has been mostly smooth. "Students are resilient when it comes to technology altogether," she says. "They know how to use it."

## Turning to the DALE Foundation

Some educators are turning to the DALE Foundation during this unique time of online learning.

To help her students continue their studies and prepare for DANB's Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) exam and DANB's Anatomy, Morphology and Physiology (AMP) exam, Brasier has turned to the DALE Foundation. Brasier has purchased the DALE Foundation's DANB RHS Review course and DANB RHS Practice Test, as well as the DANB AMP Review and DANB AMP Practice Test, for her students. "I thought this would be a great time to incorporate these into my curriculum," she says. "These subjects can be very overwhelming, with lots of little details that students have to remember."

By comparing students' pre- and post-course assessment scores, Brasier believes the DALE Foundation products are making a difference: "Students are spending extra time at home with these materials, and I have seen a huge improvement among the majority of students."

Bryant's students also have found success using the DALE Foundation's DANB RHS Practice Test, which she says helps prepare them to take DANB exams in the future.

"Students' confidence goes through the roof when they start to answer the practice test questions correctly and understand the information they've been taught," says Bryant. "I love the DALE Foundation's materials, especially now."

## DANB CERTIFICANTS DONATE SUPPLIES TO FILL PPE NEED

As COVID-19 began to spread across the nation early this spring, the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) was stretched to meet the increased demand. What resulted was a supply shortage for many medical and dental professionals and other essential workers.

In response, dental professionals, including DANB certificants, stepped up to donate supplies when they were needed most. Here, we spotlight their heroic volunteer efforts.

### Answering the call to donate

When Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) was contacted by Munson Healthcare in Michigan about donating PPE, health occupations instructor Rebecca L. Wooters, CDA, RDA, B.S., was happy to help fulfill the hospital's request.

In mid-March, Wooters coordinated the donation of about 20 boxes of masks available through the dental assisting department, in an effort to help the hospital avoid a supply shortage. "We didn't have the N95 masks, which they really wanted, but we gave them our regular operatory masks," she shares. Additionally, the NMS nursing department stepped up to contribute a couple boxes of disposable gowns and at least 10 boxes of goggles.

Rebecca L. Wooters, CDA, RDA, B.S., coordinated the donation of about 20 boxes of masks, a couple boxes of disposable gowns and at least 10 boxes of goggles.



"When we got the hospital's call on March 18 and then asked our college administrators, 'Do you mind if we donate?' we were told, 'Yes. Anything our community needs, we will donate, to support them; we would love to do that,'" Wooters recalls.

"Munson especially has always supported our health occupations program, letting nursing students come in to do their rotations and hiring our students," Wooters continues. "They're an integral part of our college's culture. Our community is great at supporting each other when needed."

# Spotlight on Excellence

## Protecting grocery workers

After her orthodontic office temporarily closed its doors, assistant Sue Knierim, COA, began sewing masks for community members, including grocery store workers, in St. Louis, Missouri.

“I’ve followed the news, and the recommendations for dental and medical professionals and the public, really closely from the beginning — because not only do I work in dental, but my husband is a store manager for a small family-owned grocery chain,” Knierim reflects. “The potential for exposure there is scary. I told my husband, ‘You need to communicate with your employees about wearing face coverings.’”

Early on, grocery store employees wore bandanas, given the medical mask shortage. But Knierim recognized this was a less-than-ideal solution. “It’s hard to wear bandanas all day, because they don’t stay on.”

So, Knierim found another way to help keep workers safe. Following patterns from a hospital website and local nursing home, she sewed approximately 180 cloth masks with a pocket for a filter. Even with limited fabric available for curbside pickup from craft stores, Knierim bought all the brightly colored fabric she could find, and gathered fabric donations from neighbors and family members.

Knierim reports, “I spent my whole time off from work making masks and have donated them to where they’re going to be used,” including the grocery stores where wearing PPE now is a requirement, a senior living center and a restaurant.



Knierim sewed these masks, which she donated to help keep her community safe.



Sue Knierim, COA

Among those who are wearing Knierim’s masks are her grandchildren, whom she’s recently been able to spend more time with at home. In fact, now that Knierim’s office has reopened, she’s made the decision to transition to “full-time Grandma” after assisting for nearly 30 years.

“I love my job, and my heart is still in it, but right now, I don’t know about going back to the office,” admits Knierim, who says she is open to assisting on a limited basis. “A big consideration for me is that two of my grandkids would have been returning to a large daycare setting, and I just didn’t want that for them. So I’ve decided to do this and see how it goes, and I’ll reevaluate in the fall and see where everything is at with COVID-19.”

## EARNING THE OSAP-DALE FOUNDATION DENTAL INFECTION CONTROL CERTIFICATE

When DANB and the DALE Foundation first announced a collaboration with the Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention (OSAP) on a comprehensive infection control education and certification initiative — including the three-step OSAP-DALE Foundation Dental Infection Prevention and Control Certificate Program™ — it was met with excitement by many who were eager to start taking the program's first two available steps.

With the program's third and final step, the eHandbook Assessment, now available as well, those who have been working to complete the program are proudly beginning to earn their certificates.

Valarie Caulfield, FAADOM, a practice administrator in Spokane Valley, Washington, completed the program shortly after the third step was made available.

"It's an honor to be among the first to do so," shares Caulfield, who has approximately 30 years of experience in the dental industry, with 28 years as a practice administrator.

Jeannie Yoon, D.D.S., who works in Fort Defiance, Arizona, also feels proud to have reached this milestone. "I'm excited to be one of the first to complete the certificate program," she agrees.

Dr. Yoon's interest in the program was piqued when she came across a mention of it on the OSAP website. "I was looking for professional-development opportunities. Part of my job as a supervisor of a 24-chair dental clinic at an Indian Health Service hospital is to be an expert on the topic of infection control. I knew immediately that this certificate would be a good fit for me and my goals to run an efficient and well-organized infection control program."



Practice administrator Valarie Caulfield, FAADOM, is among the first to complete the OSAP-DALE Foundation Dental Infection Prevention and Control Certificate Program.

Caulfield completed the OSAP-DALE Foundation Certificate Program as part of fulfilling a Mastership requirement through the American Association of Dental Office Management. Now that she holds the OSAP-DALE Foundation certificate, Caulfield is sure that it was the right step for her, and she recommends it to all her colleagues as well.

"It's imperative that office managers and the entire clinical team go through this program," Caulfield believes. "I tell my colleagues this program would benefit them greatly, because infection control knowledge and protocols are ever-changing. We always have to be up-to-date on the latest information, for our own protection and obviously for the protection of our patients, our No. 1 responsibility."

# Spotlight on Excellence

Especially now, Caulfield adds. She believes she earned the certificate at an ideal time. “This is a new normal,” Caulfield continues. “It’s ironic that I took this three-step program, and then all of a sudden, COVID-19 hit. Now more than ever, it is important to have a working knowledge of the basics of infection control.”

Dr. Yoon agrees COVID-19 has newly emphasized that infection control expertise is critical. And she believes the OSAP-DALE Foundation Certificate Program is particularly valuable because it has immediate applications for any dental clinic.

“The certificate program really reinforced my knowledge and has given me an appreciation of the importance of everyone’s roles in ensuring that our patients can trust us to provide the most up-to-date, evidence-based infection control for every visit,” says Dr. Yoon, who also has recommended the certificate program to her staff.

“I really appreciate that OSAP and the DALE Foundation have come together to provide such specific education through this certificate program,” Dr. Yoon concludes.

The OSAP-DALE Foundation Certificate Program is based on federal standards and evidence-based guidelines, was developed by leading infection control experts, and was reviewed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Oral Health. The OSAP-DALE Foundation Certificate Program is focused on the application of Standard Precautions, as addressed in guidance documents for dental providers published by CDC in 2003 and 2016 and in the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. For interim guidance related to precautions to take based on the COVID-19 pandemic, go to [dentalinfectioncontrol.org/resources/coronavirus-resources-for-dental-professionals/](https://dentalinfectioncontrol.org/resources/coronavirus-resources-for-dental-professionals/).



## GET STARTED TODAY

The OSAP-DALE Foundation Dental Infection Prevention and Control Certificate Program includes two educational steps and an online assessment. Everyone in dentistry and the dental trade is encouraged to complete this program. Steps 1 and 2 can be completed in either order.

**Step 1:** Complete the OSAP-DALE Foundation online CDEA® module Understanding CDC’s Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings

**Step 2:** Complete the OSAP-DALE Foundation Dental Infection Prevention and Control eHandbook™

**Step 3:** Pass the OSAP-DALE Foundation eHandbook Assessment™  
(You will only be eligible to access the OSAP-DALE Foundation eHandbook Assessment after you have completed the program’s first two steps. Those who have completed both steps will be notified via email.)

To learn more about the program, visit [dentalinfectioncontrol.org/education](https://dentalinfectioncontrol.org/education).

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