



Certified Press

Dental Assisting National Board, Inc.

Spring 2022

Celebrate Dental Assisting Excellence



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Dental Assistants Recognition Week
March 6-12, 2022

WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Dear readers,

This past August, I retired from dental assisting, having spent almost 50 years in the profession. Those five



short decades yielded immense change to the field of dentistry, most notably to dental technology, materials, infection prevention and control, and the role of the dental assistant.

Early in my career, dental assistants were deemed to be “just” assistants. Today, this could not be further from the truth. Dental

assistants are essential to cohesive dental teams and successful practices. Not only are we extremely valuable partners in patient care, but we are also self-driven to always be performing to the best of our ability.

This evolution alone should be celebrated during Dental Assistants Recognition Week (DARW), established by the American Dental Assistants Association, supported by DANB and the DALE Foundation, and celebrated nationwide this year from March 6-12, 2022.

This year’s theme, “Dental Assistants: Passionate about Our Patients, Dedicated to Our Profession,” is appropriate and perfectly stated.

Being able to connect with patients is a key quality of a great dental assistant. I have always felt one of our top responsibilities is meeting patients “where they are” to not only reinforce oral-hygiene instructions but also provide education about the procedure they are about to have and to answer any resulting questions. In my career, I have seen how rewarding it can be to motivate and empower patients to take responsibility for their oral healthcare to become healthier and more confident.

Because this profession is constantly changing, dental assistants understand the importance of continuing education and becoming lifelong learners. Personally, I am proud to be included in the first group of oral health professionals to earn Certified in Dental Infection Prevention and Control certification.

We assistants take pride in our careers, our practices, and our profession. We know we work hard and are worthy of appreciation and recognition.

During DARW, it is heartwarming to be reminded that our colleagues and patients agree.

This week especially, let us sing one another’s praises! Dental assistants everywhere deserve it.

Sincerely,



Lois Bell, CDA, CPFDA, CRFDA, CDIPC, MADAA Chair, DANB Board of Directors

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On the cover: Celebrate dental assisting excellence during Dental Assistants Recognition Week, held this year March 6-12, 2022.

FIRST GROUP EARNS NEW CDIPC CERTIFICATION



Infection control has gained heightened importance over the past couple of years, and many dental professionals are eager to expand their knowledge in this area to keep their offices as safe as possible.

On Dec. 29, 2021, the first group of oral health professionals earned Certified in Dental Infection Prevention and Control (CDIPC) certification. The CDIPC certification was developed by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) in collaboration with the Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention (OSAP).

The CDIPC certification is the first clinically focused dental infection control certification in the United States. The exam is rigorous and requires demonstrating not only knowledge of infection control guidelines and standards, but also the critical-thinking skills to apply them in a variety of scenarios.

“Congratulations to everyone who earned CDIPC

certification,” says DANB CEO Laura Skarnulis. “Earning this designation takes preparation, dedication and diligence. It signals to patients, employers and colleagues that you are knowledgeable, capable, and committed to dental practice safety.”

“Earning CDIPC certification is an impressive achievement that elevates the profession,” says OSAP Executive Director Michelle Lee. “It also benefits dental practices and patients by ensuring precautions are taken to make every dental visit a safe visit.”

Those who earned CDIPC certification in December did so through a special testing event. The CDIPC certification will launch in spring 2022.

News and Updates

First group excited to earn certification

When Celeste Stalberger, CDIIPC, RDH, CSPDT, had the chance to earn CDIPC certification in December, she jumped at the opportunity. She was part of the first group in the country to receive the new certification.

“It feels pretty cool,” says Stalberger, who has been a dental hygienist for 28 years and serves as the lead sterilization technician and infection control coordinator at Cass Lake Indian Health Service in Minnesota. “We’re kind of the leaders.”

Stalberger’s employer is currently working toward earning accreditation through the Joint Commission.

As the hospital continues to develop and refine standard operating procedures and training, it’s imperative for employees to have proper credentials.

By earning this certification, dental professionals can demonstrate their competence in infection control procedures and commitment to staying up to date on ever-changing protocols. Certification can not only help dental professionals excel in their current positions, but it can also help them stand out if they’re looking to advance in their careers.

Michelle Sanchez, CDIPC, RDH, A.S., has worked in dentistry for two decades. After working as a dental

CDIPC Certificants — December 2021

Julie Baker	Cheryl Engel	Patricia Lavan	Monica Satake
Angela Bartz-Kinateder	Lori Fazio	Betty Leh	Sheri Sauer
Michelle Beckham	Christine Forrester	Virginia Lopez	Hetal Shah
Lois Bell	Ana Frederick	Mackenzie Lundeen	Kelly Shutoff
Catherine Berard	Ann Gallerie	Sabina Mackinnon	Rhonda Simpson
Jennifer Bereckis	Sandra Garcia	Kimberley Maggard	Martin Smallidge
Jacobucci	Kimberly Gillland	Mindy Mathewson	Sandra Smeltzer
Rebecca Bofenkamp	Kimberly Grady	Leanne Mathieu Kramer	Belinda Spencer
Kelly Boley	Karoline Grasmuck	Susan McGuire	Celeste Stalberger
Tonja Bowcut	Karen Gregory	Jennifer McKeon	Nedra Stanford
Ashley Boyne	Rachel Grundlock	Kendra McKune	Walia Stone
Joseph Braun	Regina Gupta	Renee McNally	Marlene Storz
Christopher Brendemuhl	Katy Hansen	Beverly Merklin	Stacy Stotts
Sherrie Busby	Dana Harris	Greeta Mills	Michelle Strange
Leslie Canham	Hannah Hattaway	Joyce Moore	Sarah Stream
Roxanne Canich	Annette Hayes	Elaine Olejnik	Dawn Marie Strehl
Shirley Caracci	Tija Hunter	Pamela Onchi-Kawasaki	Audrey Tears
Shane Castro	Marianna Hvastovich-Gecaj	Catherine Orjala	Therese Tippie
India Chance	Cindy Isaak Ploegman	Miguel Ortiz Gonzalez	Hong Tran Rajak
Dawn Chick	Renee Johnson	Glenda Panzieri	Cody Truitt
Rita Cockerhan	Letitia Jones	Lori Paschall	Javette Tyson
Katie Connolly	Amanda Jorgensen	Jill Paul	Amanda Vandergriff
Chrissy Cotts	Guinevere Juckett	Carla Pegues	Sharon Vasquez
Brianna Coyne	Liliana Junqueira de Paiva	Luci Perri	Deborah Vernon
Evelyn Cuny	Donatelli	Theresa Preston	Sandra Walker
Gail Davis	Natalie Kaweckyj	Sara Reed	Catherine Warren
Karen Daw	Teresa Kohart	Melanie Regan	Matthew Wilkinson
Jill Day	Jennifer Kohlmeyer	Patricia Reynolds	June Wolken-Vierra
Theresa DeCarlo	Brandy Larson	Robynn Rixse	Belinda Works
Ann Marie DePalma	Rebecca Larson	Christina Rutledge	Donna Zagame
Kathryn Dile	Sheila Lassiter	Janice Salvadorini	Megan Zuelke
Matthew Ellis	Kimberly Laudenslager	Michelle Sanchez	Kathy Zwiag



“Having those CDIPC credentials behind your name helps validate that you know what you’re doing.”

— Michelle Sanchez, CDIPC, RDH, A.S.

In addition to the knowledge it provides, CDIPC certification can give dental professionals more influence with their practices to enact appropriate safety protocols.

“When I was in private practice, it was a lot harder to voice my opinion,” explains Stalberger, who has been a hygienist for more than 25 years. “And I think being certified will help a lot of those people in their situations fight for what they need to be safe and to have safe visits for their patients.”

That’s why Stalberger recommends other dental professionals

pursue CDIPC certification, too.

“I don’t think anybody who started the process would have any regrets at all,” she says.

How to get started

The CDIPC certification exam will officially launch in spring 2022. Candidates must fulfill education and experience requirements to be eligible for the exam, which can include holding Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) certification through DANB.

To learn more and view the eligibility requirements, visit <https://dentalinfectioncontrol.org/certification/cdipc>.

hygienist for 18 years, she recently transitioned to doing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and CPR training for dental practices in Arizona. She says her new CDIPC certification is invaluable as she helps offices establish proper infection control procedures.

“I wanted to know more information on what offices need and to make sure that their protocols are set up correctly,” she explains. “Because I teach OSHA classes, I kind of already knew a lot of it right off the top of my head, but there were some things on the exam that I definitely needed to brush up my skills on.”

Sanchez adds that the certification gives her additional credibility when she visits practices or gives lectures.

“Having those CDIPC credentials behind your name helps validate that you know what you’re doing,” she says.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need for strong infection control procedures in the dental office. CDIPC certification helps ensure that dental professionals are on the cutting edge so patients and dental staff are as safe as possible in the office.

“I’m making sure that I’m staying on top of things, especially with the protocols changing so quickly,” says Sanchez.



“Being certified will help a lot of people ... fight for what they need to be safe and to have safe visits for their patients.”

— Celeste Stalberger, CDIPC, RDH, CSPDT



David E. Gordon

“It’s hard to describe what it feels like when former students come back and tell you, ‘You’re the reason that I’m doing this.’ It puts tears in your eyes knowing that you made an impact on someone.”

— Rita Gordon, CDA, LDA, RF, RDH, M.D.H.

EDUCATORS INSPIRE FUTURE DENTAL ASSISTANTS

Educating the next generation of dental assistants is no small responsibility — and that’s why it’s so fulfilling when instructors see their students succeed.

Much like parents seeing their children reach various milestones, teachers take enormous pride in watching students grow over the course of a year and go on to become successful professionals in dental assisting and beyond.

For Rita Gordon, CDA, LDA, RF, RDH, M.D.H. — a dental careers instructor at NorthEast Metro 916 Intermediate School in White Bear Lake, Minnesota — some of the proudest moments of her 12-year teaching career were ones she was initially afraid would never come.

Gordon remembers a third-semester dental assisting student she taught during her time at Century Col-

lege; the student was initially so afraid to fail that she wouldn’t speak or even make eye contact. On the last day of class, she couldn’t come into the classroom — but not because she was fearful or anxious anymore. She didn’t want to say goodbye.

“You have no idea how much you’ve helped me grow from not being sure that I really want to do this to knowing now that I am sure that I want to do this,” Gordon recalls the student saying to her on the last day of class.

Today, that student is the lead dental assistant at the office where she works.

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It's just one of numerous examples of the positive impact dental assisting educators can have on their students.

Linda Pettine, CDA, RDH, M.Ed., has been a dental assisting instructor for 24 years and has seen similar success stories with her students at Diman Regional Vocational High School in Fall River, Massachusetts.

"It's exciting to see students who struggled with the material at first now managing practices," says Pettine.

Pettine had such an impact on one former student — Priscilla Wicks, CDA, RDH, B.S. — that Wicks returned to Diman in March 2017 to become her teaching partner. Wicks was among the first students Pettine taught at the beginning of her career.

"At first, it felt like an adjustment, especially when [Pettine] called me 'Mrs. Wicks' in front of my students," Wicks says with a laugh. "But she was my mentor back when I was a student, and now she's my mentor as a new teacher. She's been super helpful."

"It's easy for me — not so easy for her," Pettine jokes. "I think she was nervous [at first], but I don't think she's nervous anymore. We've grown together as colleagues. I was excited to see her come along."



"It's exciting to see students who struggled with the material at first now managing practices."

— Linda Pettine, CDA, RDH, M.Ed.



"I've been doing this for over 30 years, and what's so rewarding is coming here and teaching these young students all I know."

— Karen Cirillo, CDA, RDA, B.S.

Karen Cirillo, CDA, RDA, B.S. — a fellow dental assisting instructor at Diman — gets her teeth cleaned by a former student who is now a hygienist. Cirillo takes pride in that, as her goal is to help develop capable dental professionals who will support the Fall River community.

"Our names are behind these students," says Cirillo. "All the dentists in this community know us in Fall River. We really want to make sure that these students are good dental assistants."

Giving back to the next generation

Gordon, Pettine, Wicks and Cirillo have seen their high-school students move on to become not only successful dental assistants but also dental hygienists, office managers and dentists. One of Gordon's previous students is even an associate university dean.

These moments can be particularly special for dental assisting educators, many of whom are current or former dental assistants or hygienists themselves.

"I like giving back my knowledge, and sharing what I know," says Pettine. "I like to see people grow, and it's exciting to see people be successful and know that they were my students. Practicing dental hygiene still, I

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go into offices and I see people who were my students, and it's very rewarding."

Cirillo, who worked as a dental assistant for over three decades before transitioning to education, agrees.

"I've been doing this for over 30 years, and what's so rewarding is coming here and teaching these young students all I know," says Cirillo, who teaches freshmen.

Cirillo and Wicks are also involved with SkillsUSA Championships, which are career competition events showcasing top students in the nation. Several of their students have won medals at the events. One of Cirillo's dental assisting students, who is now finishing his last year of dental school, won a gold medal at SkillsUSA three years in a row.

Wicks, who participated in SkillsUSA when she was a student, says it's even more rewarding to see her students succeed than it was to win medals herself.

"It's like watching your child be good at something," Wicks elaborates.

Managing the challenges

A lot of hard work goes into these rewarding moments, however — for both students and teachers.

Students face a challenging curriculum, from preparing for DANB exams to learning about various dental terminology, instruments, infection control and CPR. Dental assisting educators must also help students develop the secondary skills needed to excel, such as communication and professionalism.

Each age group also comes with unique challenges.

Freshmen typically take some time to adjust to high school, says Cirillo. It's become more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic with online learning and classroom limitations.



It's even more rewarding to see students succeed: "It's like watching your child be good at something."

— Priscilla Wicks, CDA, RDH, B.S.

"I think the last time it was a real, normal year for them was sixth grade, if you think about it," says Cirillo. "So, in September, I did find teaching then to be a bit challenging. Now, they seem to have learned and adjusted to high school. But it was really, really hard at first."

Sophomores at Diman have to take their first DANB exam, which comes with a level of learning and studying they aren't used to, says Pettine.

"They haven't seen anything like it, and it takes a while to mold them to realize how important it is to study," explains Pettine.

For Gordon's seniors, there's uncertainty about their future

and whether dental assisting is the right career path for them.

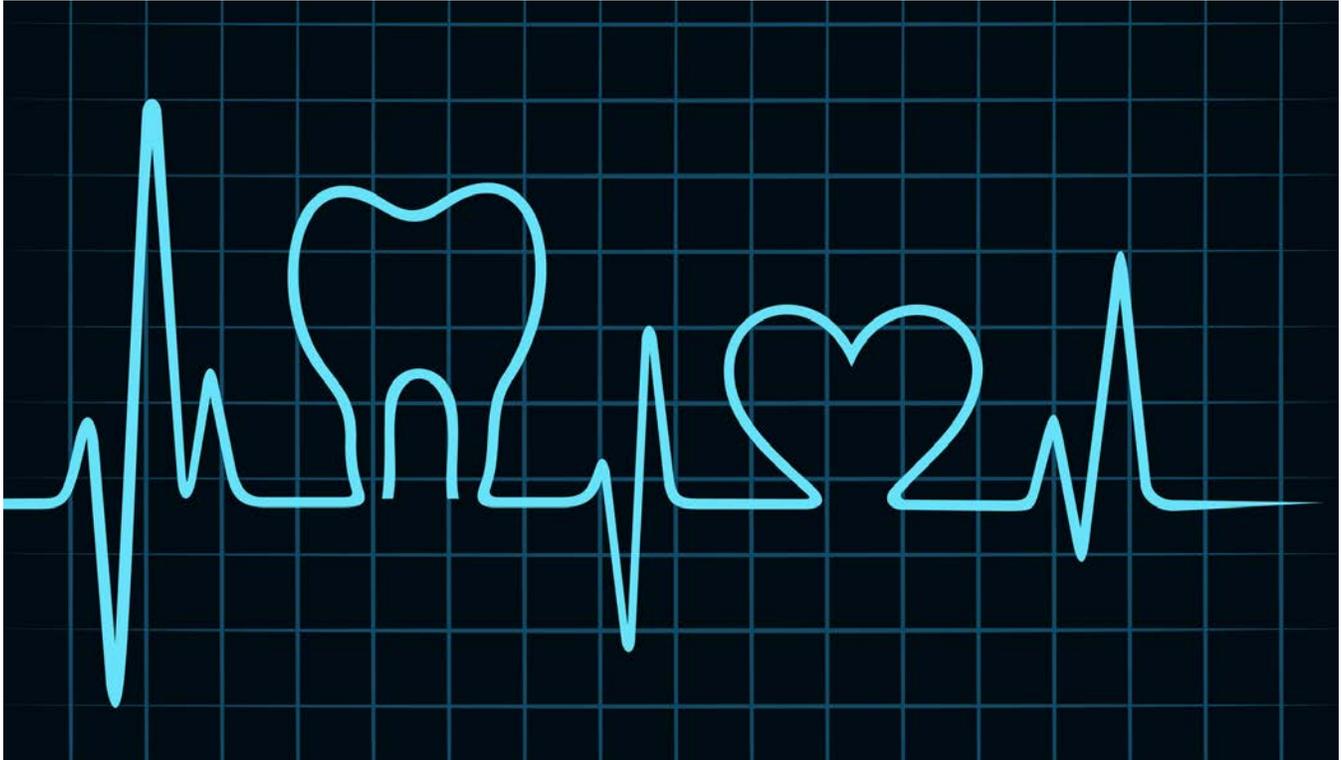
"Dental assisting is not promoted the same as dental hygiene in high schools," says Gordon. "A lot of students look at dental assisting as substandard, like, 'Oh, maybe I don't even need to do that. I just want to be a hygienist.' So, I strive to help them see that dental assisting is actually a standalone career. You can be a dental assistant and be successful in dentistry."

Gordon adds: "The demand for dental assistants would never go away because we're needed, we're wanted, we are a valuable asset in a dental office, and you can truly be a successful dental assistant in the right environment with the right training and the right office to work. I can't see a world without dental assistants."

When students overcome those hurdles and go on to find success in the field, it's fulfilling not only for them — but also for the teachers who guided them along the way.

"It's hard to describe what it feels like when former students come back and tell you, 'You're the reason that I'm doing this,'" says Gordon. "It puts tears in your eyes knowing that you made an impact on someone."

DENTAL ASSISTANTS PLAY KEY ROLE IN PATIENT HEALTH



Although it's often unrecognized, dental assistants are crucial to not only their patients' oral health but also their overall health.

For many patients, receiving dental care simply means keeping a bright smile and healthy mouth. But it may also help them maintain a healthy heart. Ashley Johnson, CDA — the dental coordinator at Community Health Partners in Livingston, Montana — has seen her team identify multiple patients with risk factors for heart disease after taking their blood pressure in the office.

“They didn't know they were at risk until we warned them about their high blood pressure,” explains Johnson. “When they left, they realized they should go to the doctor.”

At Community Health Partners, Johnson's team takes every patient's blood pressure during their dental appointments. It's become a more common practice

at dental offices across the country because it can help identify hypertension, which puts people at an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

And it's just another reason to visit the dental office twice per year and maintain good oral hygiene.

Professional cleanings — as well as everyday brushing and flossing — do far more than fight off stains and cavities. Dental care plays a pivotal role in overall wellness that often goes unrecognized.

Dental assistants are trying to promote the importance of oral healthcare, and of dental assistants to dentistry.

Every day, dental assisting professionals use versatile technical and interpersonal skills to help treat, educate and comfort patients. While these may seem like basic

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job duties, they go a long way toward helping patients maintain strong dental and overall health.

The education component is crucial, according to Johnson.

“A lot of people don’t realize that bacteria doesn’t just stay in your mouth,” says Johnson. “It travels throughout your body.”

Paula Eastwood, a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) certificant at UConn Health Center in Farmington, Connecticut, agrees.

“Even though a tooth may seem small, it contributes to your general well-being, because an infection in the tooth is connected to your bloodstream and that could affect your heart or your brain,” explains Eastwood. “That’s why it’s so important for people to practice prevention.”

If patients let bacteria build up in the mouth, the damaging effects can go beyond tooth decay and gum disease. According to the Mayo Clinic, oral bacteria — and accompanying inflammation — can travel to or affect other areas of the body and may contribute to issues such as heart disease, pregnancy complications and pneumonia.

“Some people don’t understand the importance of the connection between oral health and overall health until you explain it to them because they may be thinking, ‘It’s just my mouth. I’m fine,’” says Johnson.

That’s why regular dental appointments are critical. Not only do patients get harmful plaque and bacteria removed from their teeth, but they also receive education on the importance of oral hygiene and regular dental visits.

“We have had many patients who have come back to the dental office after time away and then realized the tooth pain they had, possibly as a result of putting off going to see the dentist, was the whole reason they felt so bad for so many years,” says Johnson. “They realized they had more energy than ever before after their infected tooth was treated.”

For Eastwood, who works in pediatric dentistry, appointments are opportunities to set children up for a lifetime of routine oral healthcare and strong oral health.

“It’s important to make sure patients take home their toothbrush and toothpaste because those things can



Ashley Johnson, CDA, has seen her team identify patients with risk factors for heart disease after taking their blood pressure in the office: “They didn’t know they were at risk until we warned them about their high blood pressure. When they left, they realized they should go to the doctor.”

be forgotten,” says Eastwood. “This is your prize. This is how you’re going to keep your treasure, your teeth, your pearl. Because if you take care of your teeth, your teeth are going to take care of you.”

Breaking barriers to better well-being

A dental assistant’s duties don’t stop at helping the dentist or hygienist during an appointment. A key component of the job is making patients feel comfortable — enough so that they return for routine exams every six months and maintain healthy mouths for a lifetime.

The reasons people might avoid dental appointments vary. Many face financial barriers. Some fear going to the dentist or feel embarrassed about showing someone their mouth. Others simply don’t know they should visit a dentist twice a year or feel it isn’t important.

“I didn’t realize until I started working here that it was not common for people to go to the dentist every six months,” said Johnson. “My parents made us go. Whether they could afford it or not, we were at the

dentist every six months. It was a huge eye-opener for me to see that it wasn't part of everybody's every day."

When people don't seek professional dental care as often as they should, or at all, this can increase their risk of cavities and gum disease, which can lead to other health problems. A 2010 study by the *Journal of Dental Research* found that people who have a dental checkup even once per year had better-than-average oral health and fewer missing teeth due to cavities.

Johnson believes dental assistants are invaluable in helping patients overcome barriers to care.

"I think a big part of that is making sure that nobody ever feels ashamed when they come to the dental office, especially in community health centers when some people haven't been seen for years," explains Johnson.

Eastwood has helped organize a dental health fair in Hartford, Connecticut, to help underserved people in the community. Along with her fellow volunteers, Eastwood gave people resources to find dentists, offered dental checkups, and distributed toothbrushes and toothpaste.

"I was so delighted to be able to serve in that capacity, not just at the health center, but for the community," says Eastwood. "This is where I find a lot of fulfillment and purpose."

Building a genuine rapport with patients is another factor that can keep them coming back to the dental office.

"Even just remembering if they have a cat or the cat's name can totally turn a patient's attitude or day around when they're in the chair. They realize that they're not just another number, but they are a patient and they are your priority," says Johnson.

Knowing how to put patients at ease is especially important when working with children, Eastwood explains, because alleviating their fears and creating a positive experience can make them feel comfortable coming back throughout their life. This includes everything from using kid-friendly terminology such as "sugar bugs" to promising a sticker for good behavior.

"They start to relax and feel at peace and comfortable," says Eastwood. "That's what my role is as a dental assistant. And I win a lot of kids over in my approach."

Johnson also encourages her dental assistants to stay in exam rooms and listen to what dentists tell patients. This helps dental assistants understand why a diagnosis was made or a procedure was recommended so they can then relay that information to patients in a relatable, unintimidating way.

"Sometimes, [patients] can hear it three different times from the dentist, but they might not understand it until you as a dental assistant change your wording," says Johnson. "And you don't know that until you stay in the room with the dentist and the patient, and you see different cues from a patient — whether it's nodding or a look of confusion."

Taking extra time to help patients understand their dental health helps them become more comfortable in the dental chair and willing to come back to the office to the office in six months.

"Everybody jokes about if we had a dollar for every time somebody said, 'I hate being at the dentist,'" says Johnson. "But we've actually had some people who have come over that hurdle. And now they are some of our loyal patients who come every six months."



"Even though a tooth may seem small, it contributes to your general well-being," says Paula Eastwood, CDA (fourth from left). "That's why it's so important for people to practice prevention."

PROUD TO ACCOMPLISH EARNING CDA CERTIFICATION

Passing DANB exams is the exciting next step for many dental assistants.

In 2021, more than 2,500 DANB Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) exam candidates joined the community of 36,000-plus DANB certificants.

New certificants agree passing DANB exams is an accomplishment worth celebrating. They're quickly learning there are many personal and professional advantages to becoming and staying certified.

"DANB CDA certificants stand out as dental assistants," says Brian Andrade, CDA, of Central Islip, New York, who earned certification in December 2021. "Anyone who has any knowledge about how much work it takes to actually pass the exams, and how

much information the exams cover, understands just what becoming certified truly means."

Meredith Marks, CDA, of Stuart, Iowa, agrees earning DANB certification is meaningful: "I proved to myself that I can be successful if I try, and that I can get through anything with hard work."

The journey to earning DANB certification

There are many reasons to become certified — for dental assistants to grow their knowledge, skills and salary; to climb the career ladder; and to provide better patient care and team contributions, among other reasons. For many, the certification journey started in school or at the office where they were first introduced to the field.

Marks came to the "dental world," as she calls it, through a high school job-shadowing opportunity at Johnson Orthodontics in Iowa. "I was pretty lucky to have that," she reflects, "and I really took a liking there to dental assisting."

Marks went on to study dental assisting at Des Moines Area Community College, then accepted a full-time assistant role at Johnson Orthodontics in August 2021 and earned DANB CDA certification three months later. In school, Marks remembers learning why she should consider certification. "I realized it was something I would like to do," she says. "I'm so happy I did it."

While attending Stony Brook School of Dental Medicine's one-year dental assisting program in 2018, Andrade also heard about certification.

But it was when he graduated and immediately afterward started working at Goldberg Orthodontics in Roslyn, New York, that Andrade really took the next steps, with the support of his employer.

"It was the initial plan from the get-go that I would get certified," Andrade elaborates. "When the dentist hired me, he said, 'I like my assistants to be certified here.'"



"Anyone who has any knowledge about how much work it takes to actually pass the exams, and how much information the exams cover, understands just what becoming certified truly means."

— Brian Andrade, CDA



“I proved to myself that I can be successful if I try, and that I can get through anything with hard work.”

— Meredith Marks, CDA

The benefits CDA certification brings

Once they became immersed in the DANB exam-application and preparation process, both Andrade and Marks realized becoming certified would bring many benefits.

First, passing DANB exams involves extensive studying, so preparing for the exams helped expand on the knowledge they gained in the classroom. Marks found the practice tests available through DANB’s affiliate, the DALE Foundation, to be helpful refreshers of dental assisting topics she learned in school.

Beyond knowledge, Andrade has seen his salary grow since passing DANB exams. “Holding certification can bring perks such as better pay,” he says. “Plus, you stand out from the rest, compared to an assistant who isn’t certified, when it comes to hiring. I feel like employers would rather choose to bring someone who is certified into the office.”

Marks says for her, the top benefit of becoming certified is having career mobility in case she’d like to take a position out of state. “It’s cool knowing that I could be of help anywhere in the dental assisting field,” she shares. “There’s nothing holding me back if I want to move.”

Dental assistants who earn certification also report feeling professional pride. “When I read that I passed all of the exams on my first try, I was overjoyed,” Andrade remembers. “It was a very good feeling.” Marks agrees finding out she passed was a special moment: “I called my parents when I found out — I was just ecstatic. The tests were not easy at all, and I studied really hard.”

Certification is just the beginning

For most, becoming CDA certified is the first of many professional goals they hope to achieve. This is true for Andrade and Marks.

Both assistants are now encouraged to keep going in their DANB certification journey. Since they work in orthodontics, they’re considering also becoming DANB Certified Orthodontic Assistant (COA) certified in the near future. “I’m figuring out a game plan for when,” shares Andrade.

In the long-term, Andrade believes that maintaining certification will strengthen his applications for pursuing higher education in medicine or dentistry. Marks feels the same way about potentially studying dental hygiene and plans to pursue expanded functions credentials.

“Working as a dental assistant has given me the opportunity to discover I really can do more in the dental field,” says Andrade. “I feel DANB certification will open up more opportunities for me in the future.”

Marks agrees. “My goal as a dental assistant is to be as successful as I can be,” she says. “I’m focused on dental assisting first, and I’m excited to see where that takes me as a DANB certificant.”

Learn more about certification

Those who earn DANB certification join a group of more than 36,000 — and growing — certified assistants nationwide. Learn more at www.danb.org.



SCHOLARSHIP BRINGS DREAMS INTO FOCUS

2021 ADA/DANB Scholarship winners share inspirational plans for reaching their dental assisting career goals.

The American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA) and DANB have named Angelica Morales-Maez, CDA; Stacey Simon, CDA, COA, RDA, EFDA, FADAA, B.A.; and Jami Van Enkevort, CDA, FADAA, as winners of the 2021 ADA/DANB Scholarship. They were selected from dental assistants who applied from across the country, and will use the scholarship funds to turn their dental assisting dreams into reality.

Reaching for a second DANB certification

Scholarship winner Angelica Morales-Maez has had DANB's Certified Restorative Functions Dental Assistant (CRFDA) certification on her mind since earning Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) certification in 2016.

"I've always wanted to take the CRFDA exams," says Morales-Maez, of Fairbanks, Alaska. "I got CDA certified before I left active duty in the U.S. Army, and then I told myself I was going to get CRFDA certified pretty quickly after that."

But then life became busy.

Around that time, Morales-Maez transitioned from being an active-duty dental technician in the U.S. Army to serving in the U.S. National Guard and re-entering the civilian workforce. Now, she's working as an oral surgery assistant at Bassett Army Community Hospital at Fort Wainwright. In this role, Morales-Maez is an experienced assistant whom her colleagues look to for guidance — and she doesn't take this responsibility lightly. In fact, it's why she's still interested in earning and maintaining multiple certifications.

When Morales-Maez first learned of the scholarship being offered through DANB and the ADAA, she knew this was the perfect opportunity to seek support for her certification goal.

"When I learned I was a winner, I thought: 'This is meant to be.' Being selected gave me more encouragement to push forward and put these funds toward finally earning CRFDA certification," she says.

For Morales-Maez, this is what being an outstanding dental assistant and DANB certificant is all about: achieving more for oneself, one's patients and teams,

and the overall profession. "If anybody is on the fence about getting certified, or deciding whether they should stop at one certification, I feel that they should continue," she says. "You should always stay a little hungry. And don't be afraid to feed others — because your knowledge trickles down."



"When I learned I was a winner, I thought: 'This is meant to be.' Being selected gave me more encouragement to push forward and put these funds toward finally earning CRFDA certification."

— Angelica Morales-Maez, CDA

Expanding dental knowledge

Scholarship winner Jami Van Enkevort also recognizes the importance of gaining and sharing education as a dental assistant. When the dental assistant instructor at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) in Green Bay submitted her scholarship application, she envisioned being able to grow both her knowledge and her students' knowledge in radiology if selected.

"This scholarship will not only benefit me, but also the future dental assistant students who attend NWTC," Van Enkevort wrote to the scholarship committee. As a winner, she plans to enroll in the Educational and Clinical Application for Proprietary Radiology Educators course offered in spring 2022 through the University of North Carolina Adams School of Dentistry.

"My mentors have taken this course years ago and spoken very highly of it," Van Enkevort says. "Whenever it's mentioned at training events, I think, 'This is a sign. I need to do this.' The time has come!"

Helping patients access care

Scholarship winner Stacey Simon of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, also believes in pursuing "signs" lighting the way along her career path.

She remembers feeling thrilled to receive information in the mail about the online Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC) certificate program at Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

Two years later, this opportunity remained on her mind while writing to the scholarship committee. "When I saw that brochure, I immediately thought, 'This is it! THIS is how I can help people!'"

Simon has long been passionate about helping those dental patients with limited access to dental care or without dental insurance. She currently works as a dental coordinator with His Hands Free Clinic — a nonprofit ministry providing free healthcare to Cedar Rapids and surrounding communities — after starting at the clinic as a volunteer.



"This scholarship will not only benefit me, but also the future dental assistant students who attend Northeast Wisconsin Technical College."

— Jami Van Enkevort, CDA, FADAA

"I'm passionate about doing everything I can to help people," says Simon, "and I'm very excited to start this journey in my career, thanks to the ADAA and DANB. I can't wait to give back to the patients by completing the CDHC certificate program."

About the scholarship

The ADAA/DANB Scholarship, open to all ADAA members in good standing, is awarded annually to dental assistants who demonstrate a strong commitment to career growth and lifelong learning. Winners receive between \$250 and \$1,000. To learn more, visit www.danb.org or www.adaausa.org.



"I'm passionate about doing everything I can to help people and I'm very excited to start this journey in my career, thanks to the ADAA and DANB."

— Stacey Simon, CDA, COA, RDA, EFDA, FADAA, B.A.

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444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 900
Chicago, IL 60611
1-800-367-3262 • www.danb.org

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