

NDDAA NEWSLETTER



North Dakota Dental Assistants Association

July 2026

Dear Members of the American Dental Assistants Association and Friends,

It is an honor and privilege to serve as President of the North Dakota American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA). I am proud to represent a profession dedicated to compassion, professionalism, education, and excellence in patient care.

As dental assistants, we play an essential role in the success of every dental practice and in the health and well-being of the patients we serve each day. Our commitment to teamwork, continuing education, and high standards of care strengthens our profession and helps improve oral health outcomes in communities across the country.

This year, our association remains focused on supporting dental assistants through professional development opportunities, advocacy efforts, and meaningful member resources. We are committed to encouraging growth within our profession while promoting the value and importance of dental assistants in today's evolving healthcare environment.

I encourage each of you to stay engaged with the ADAA by participating in educational programs, networking opportunities, community outreach efforts, and local and national events. Your dedication and involvement are what make this organization strong.

Thank you for your continued hard work, passion, and commitment to excellence. Together, we will continue advancing the profession of dental assisting and making a positive impact on the lives of the patients and communities we serve.

Sincerely,

Carman Duerr,
NDDAA President

ADAA Mission Statement

"To advance the careers of dental assistants through education, credentialing, legislative advocacy, and professional activities that improve the delivery of quality dental health care."

North Dakota Dental Assistants Association

2026 Annual State Convention

Radisson Hotel, Bismarck ND

Schedule of Events for September 17-18th, 2026

Thursday, September 17

3:00 p.m. –12:00 a.m.	Exhibitors Hall Open	Radisson Hotel
3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	NDDA CE courses for complete details please go to smilenorthdakota.org	Radisson Hotel
7:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.	President Mixer, Minute to Win It Edition	Radisson Hotel, Exhibit Hall

Friday, September 18

7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Exhibit Hall Open	Radisson Hotel, Room
7:30 a.m.- 8:00 a.m.	Registration	Radisson Hotel,
8:00 a.m. - 9:00 am	Artificial Intelligence in Dentistry: A Practical Look	Dr John Persson
9 :00 a.m. –10:00 a.m.	Smile like it matters: Lessons from the science of thriving	Dr. Tara Feil, PhD, Clinical Psychologist
10:00 a.m. -11:00 a.m.	Not Just Sucking Spit Any Longer: Digital Dentistry with Scanning, 3D Printing & In-House Milling	Kari Kolling, RDH, BS
11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	‘Treating Malocclusion with SureSmile’	Emma Johnson
12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch - General Assembly	
1:00 p.m. - 2:00 pm	Medical Emergencies in the Dental Office	Joseph R. Deatherage, DMD, MD
2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Dental Assistant by Day, Pretzel by Noon Practical posture & Ergonomic Tools for Career Longevity & Pain Relief	Dr. Denise Wetzel, PT, DPT
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m..	“Hearing health in dentistry, protecting your hearing while caring for others.”	Dr. Matt Frisk, Audiologist



Artificial Intelligence in Dentistry: A Practical Look

Dr John Persson

Artificial intelligence is quietly becoming part of everyday clinical practice. It's reading radiographs, drafting clinical notes, and handling small tasks that used to eat into our days. For dental teams, the question is no longer whether to engage with AI, but how to do it thoughtfully.

This session takes a practical, friendly look at two areas where AI is already making a real difference: radiology diagnostics and clinical documentation. We'll walk through how these tools actually work, what they're good at, where they fall short, and how a dental team (dentists, hygienists, and assistants) can use them in a way that respects both the clinician's judgment and the patient's trust.

Just as importantly, we'll spend real time on the ethics. Keeping a human in the loop, communicating honestly with patients about what AI is and isn't doing, and recognizing that these tools are meant to support, not replace, the people doing the clinical work. The goal isn't to hand the practice over to a computer; it's to give the team back some time and use technology in a way that still feels like good dentistry.

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the current state of AI in dentistry, with a focus on radiology and clinical documentation
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of AI tools, including where they can fail or mislead
- Implement practical, team-based strategies for keeping a human in the loop when using AI chairside
- Understand key ethical considerations, including patient communication, consent, and clinician oversight
- Apply a thoughtful framework for evaluating new AI tools before bringing them into a practice

Dr. John Persson is one of the creators of SugarBot, an FDA-cleared AI tool for dental radiograph visualization and an AI scribe for clinical documentation. He practices dentistry at BSC Mystic Smiles, a non-profit community clinic in Bismarck that cares for patients of all ages, including many on Medicaid and from underserved backgrounds. The rest of his time goes to SugarBot, where he works across the company, from writing software and training machine learning models to navigating FDA regulatory work.

A 2016 graduate of the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry, Dr. Persson spent eight years in private practice before turning his focus to building practical tools for dental teams. SugarBot grew out of conversations with former classmates about what clinicians actually need from technology.

Originally from Bismarck, Dr. Persson lives with his wife and their two young children. When he's not in the operatory or in front of a code editor, he's most likely mountain biking or sailing on Lake Sakakawea.

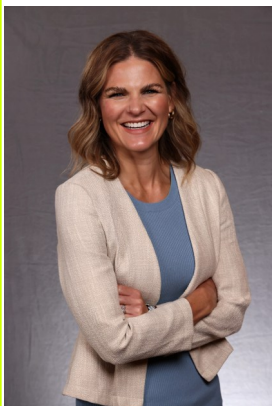


Smile like it matters: Lessons from the science of thriving

Dr. Tara Feil, PhD, Clinical Psychologist

Join clinical psychologist and TEDx speaker Dr. Tara Feil for a dynamic presentation on the science of thriving. Drawing from psychology and neuroscience, Dr Feil will explore what research reveals about well-being, stress, positive emotion, and human performance. Attendees will learn practical, science-based strategies to manage stress, build resilience, strengthen relationships, improve communication, and foster health and well-being at work and at home.

Dr Tara Feil is a clinical psychologist, educator, consultant, and TEDx speaker who is passionate about helping people thrive personally and professionally. She has taught college courses in psychology, worked with adults and teens in clinical practice, and provides education and consulting services to business and organizations. Dr Feil enjoys speaking and writing about science-based ways to increase well-being, strengthen relationships, manage stress, and maximize personal and professional success. Her work helps individuals and teams apply practical psychology to everyday life, work, and patient care.



Not Just Sucking Spit Any Longer: Digital Dentistry with Scanning, 3D Printing & In-House Milling **Kari Kolling, RDH, BS**

Dentistry has come a long way from suction and trays. This engaging course explores the exciting world of digital dentistry and how today's practices are transforming workflows with intraoral scanning, 3D printing, and in-house milling. Learn how modern technology can streamline procedures, improve patient experience, reduce turnaround times, and create new opportunities for efficiency and growth.

Through practical applications and real-world examples, attendees will discover how digital workflows are reshaping restorative dentistry — from the first scan to the final restoration.

Kari's passion for the dental industry began in high school, working as an office-trained dental assistant in Northern Wisconsin. After earning her Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene from the University of Minnesota in 2002, she spent over two decades providing exceptional clinical care. In 2023, Kari started a new chapter with Patterson Dental as their CAD/CAM Specialist. Today, she demonstrates how digital integration is transforming practices from streamlining workflows, elevating patient experiences, and empowering dental teams with cutting-edge tools. She finds fulfillment helping practices thrive through advanced technology, hands-on education, and strategic decision-making.

When she isn't empowering dental teams, Kari is proudly "solar-powered" and loves doing anything outdoors. You can also find her baking sourdough, navigating the transition to parenting two young adults, and spending quality time with her patient and kind husband, Matt.



'Treating Malocclusion with SureSmile' **Emma Johnson**

This course provides an overview of treating malocclusion with SureSmile clear aligners, including case selection, digital treatment planning, workflow integration, and patient communication. Attendees will learn practical strategies for incorporating clear aligner therapy into daily practice to improve clinical efficiency, patient experience, and treatment outcomes through real-world applications and clinical examples.

Emma graduated from North Dakota State University in 2023 with a degree in Biology. Following college, she has been working for Dentsply Sirona as a SureSmile representative for three years covering the Dakotas, Nebraska and previously Montana and Wyoming. When she isn't driving the great plains, she enjoys playing pickleball and a newfound passion of home renovations.



EVERYONE'S INVITED
ANNUAL NDDA PRESIDENT'S MIXER
Minute to Win It Edition
TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE NORTH DAKOTA DENTAL FOUNDATION
Exhibit Hall, Radisson Hotel 7:00 p.m. - Midnight



Medical Emergencies in the Dental Office

Joseph R. Deatherage, DMD, MD

This course will provide an overview of recognizing and managing medical emergencies in the dental office setting. Attendees will review common emergency situations that may arise during dental treatment, including syncope, allergic reactions, respiratory distress, cardiac events, and complications related to sedation or anesthesia. The presentation will focus on early recognition, effective team response, emergency preparedness, and appropriate use of emergency equipment and medications. Participants will gain practical knowledge and confidence to help ensure patient safety and improve outcomes during medical emergencies in the dental practice.

Dr. Deatherage is a board certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon at Face and Jaw Surgery Center where he specializes in dentoalveolar and implant surgery, management of oral pathology, removal of wisdom teeth, and outpatient intravenous anesthesia and general anesthesia. Dr. Deatherage has been practicing for over 34 years, with 16 of those years at Face and Jaw Surgery Center.

He earned his dental degree from University of Alabama School of Dentistry in 1987. He continued at the University of Alabama as a research fellow in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery for one year, then pursued his education at the University of Texas Health Science Center from 1988-94 where he completed his Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery training and was awarded his MD in 1992.



Dental Assistant by Day, Pretzel by Noon Practical Posture & Ergonomic Tools for Career Longevity and Pain Relief

Dr. Denise Wetzel, PT, DPT

This engaging session helps dental assistants identify posture pitfalls, improve ergonomic habits, and reduce physical strain during daily procedures. Through practical demonstrations, simple exercises, and real-world strategies, attendees will learn how to protect their bodies while delivering exceptional patient care.

Denise Wetzel is a physical therapist and co-owner of Optimum Therapies in Mandan, which she opened a little over a year ago. She is passionate about providing compassionate, individualized care and helping people feel confident and capable throughout their healing journey.

Her clinical interests include oncology rehabilitation, orthopedics, chronic pain, pelvic health, and dry needling. She takes a whole-person approach to treatment, focusing not only on physical recovery but also on understanding each patient's goals, lifestyle, and story to create care plans that truly fit their needs.

She especially enjoys working with individuals navigating cancer treatment and chronic pain conditions and finds it incredibly rewarding to help patients improve their quality of life and achieve goals that are meaningful to them.

Outside of work, she enjoys coaching and playing volleyball, reading, gardening, spending time with her family, and taking on home projects with her husband.





“Hearing health in dentistry, protecting your hearing while caring for others.”

Dr. Matt Frisk, AUDIOLOGIST

“Dentistry exposes clinicians to consistent, often underestimated noise levels that can lead to gradual hearing damage. This course explores the risk of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss, early warning signs, and practical strategies for protection. Attendees will learn how to safeguard their hearing while maintaining clear communication with patients and staff, along with an overview of modern hearing solutions tailored to dental professionals.”

I attended NDSU for electrical engineering and pre-medicine, graduating in 1994, Louisiana State University Medical Center, graduating in 1998 with a masters in audiology. Doctorate of Audiology from the University of Florida, graduating in 2005.

I’ve practiced audiology for over 25 years. I started the first cochlear implant clinic in North Dakota in 1999. We’ve implanted over 400 patients and restored hearing in the vast majority of these patient. I am the president and owner of Hearing Solutions in Fargo, and have been in practice for over 25 years working with amplification cochlear implantation, hearing conservation and auditory rehab rehabilitation.

I’m married to a pediatric audiologist who works at Essentia. I have three kids and a dog who comes to work every day in my clinic who’s official title is the “patient greeter”

2026 DENTAL ASSISTANT RECOGNITION AWARD

Do you have an amazing Dental Assistant in your office that you would like to recognize for their outstanding qualities? If they meet the criteria below, then nominate them for the 2026 Dental Assistant Recognition Award that is given annually at the state meeting. This years award will be given on Friday, September 18, 2026 during General Assembly . Any dental assistant who is a member of the American Dental Assistants Association and has outstanding professional achievements is eligible.

Please include the nominee’s name and address, reason for your nomination, and your name, address, and phone number in your submission. Submit nominations to **Linsey Leadbetter**

by August 10, 2026 to leadbetterlinsey@gmail.com

DENTAL ASSISTANT RECOGNITION AWARD

This award is given annually at the state meeting. Any dental assistant who qualifies in one or more of the following areas is eligible for this outstanding award. Areas include:

- Outstanding professional achievements
- Contributions / service to the community without support or organization
- Ideas that change dentistry for the better
- ADAA member accomplishments
- Lifetime of service or single act of selflessness
- Any other reason you may think will qualify



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Election time is here again!

It is that time of the year again for the election of officers for the NDDAA board. You are invited to the General Assembly Meeting on Friday, September 18 to share in the nomination process for the board of the North Dakota Dental Assistants' Association. Serving on the NDDAA board is a fun and rewarding experience as you represent your state association and help to make important decisions regarding the dental assistants in North Dakota. Maybe you would like to nominate someone for an office, or maybe you would like to have someone nominate you. Come join us and make some lasting friendships along the way!

The following is a list of each position and a few of their duties:

President - Schedules/presides over meetings, serves as a delegate to the ADAA national meeting

President Elect – Makes arrangements for the Spring and Annual Session meetings

Vice President – Handles memberships, coordinates DARW and DANB Scholarship Awards

Immediate Past President – Assist President with any duties & fills any vacant position on the board

Secretary – Records minutes, conducts correspondence, designs and makes badges for annual session

Treasurer – Custodian of monies, prepares the budget

State Representatives – in charge of door prizes and raffle for annual session

Editor – Organize and publish the newsletters, maintains the website, and Bylaws chair .

Educator — Liaison to the board from an educators prospective, encourage student involvement, coordinate student luncheon with vice president, work with editor on website on educational access & incorporate new ideas.

Liaison - Must attend North Dakota Dental Examiners meetings consisting of 4 meetings annually as a nonvoting member, communicate to both boards what each board activities are.

Duties of all officers:

- Serve as a member of the board of directors for the current year
- Takes care that the good intentions of the association are reflected in all correspondence
- Answers all correspondence immediately and completely
- Always directs any correspondence with the NDDAA to the President with an additional copy to the secretary
- Sends copies of correspondence to each NDDAA board member and to any other officers or members concerned; retains copies for file
- Maintains complete file of year's activities
- Prepares a report of your activities for presentation to the board of directors and to the General Assembly at each session of the association. This report shall be sent to the president and secretary with a copy retained for file
- If needed, prepares an account of expenses incurred during the term of office for presentation at the pre-annual session, with copies to be sent to the president and secretary
- Approves the budget for the following year and abides by governing budget during term of office
- Fulfills all duties as directed by the president, board of directors, General Assembly, the bylaws and the officer's manual



2025-2026 NDDAA Board Members

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