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NORTHWESTERN DISTRICT OF THE GEORGIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

The activities of the Northwestern District of the Georgia Dental Association are described, including three annual membership meetings for introducing the state association president and officers, visiting with legislators, and a meeting for continuing education. The legislative activities of the state association and the association's member benefits are also described.

The Northwestern District of the Georgia Dental Association is one of seven districts of the Georgia Dental Association (GDA). Each district represents a geographical area of the state of Georgia. Each district has officers ranging from president to secretary, with an executive council. The council's members hold various appointments, such as governmental affairs, dental recovery network, necrology, hospitality, peer review, forensics, retention and recruitment, GDAPAC, and non-dues revenues. Each district meets monthly from September to May at various locations within the district.

MEETINGS

The Northwestern District has three general membership meetings per year. The first is to introduce the membership to the officers of the GDA. This meeting is usually held in October or November. During the meeting, the president of the GDA is introduced and he or she meets and greets the membership and informs the membership about current dental issues in Georgia. This meeting is usually a few hours long and includes cocktails and a sit-down dinner. The GDA president attends this introductory meeting for each district in the state. Because the GDA president comes from a different part of the state in any given year, the introductory meeting is an opportunity for local dentists to have a conversation

and perhaps build a relationship with the GDA president that might not otherwise occur.

The second general membership meeting of the Northwestern District, referred to as the Legislative Fish Fry, is usually held in December. This meeting is very important and is usually our best attended meeting. Each legislator in the state is invited to this meeting by his or her contact dentist, who is a designated dentist in the legislator's district. Sometimes the contact dentist is the legislator's personal dentist. The contact dentist has an ongoing relationship with the legislator and has meetings throughout the year with the legislator. These meetings range from simple dinners to golf outings. The Fish Fry is typically held at a country club in the Northwestern District. Each legislator receives a Fish Fry tie or scarf and welcome gift. The Fish Fry ties are a big hit and the design changes each year. They are typically silk ties, may have a fish motif, and are always a good conversation piece. The menu at the Fish Fry is, not surprisingly, seafood-themed. No one leaves hungry. The meeting begins with a general greeting and introduction of the Northwestern District officers by the district's president. The executive



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director of the GDA then gives a short summary of the current dental legislative issues in Georgia. The legislators are then given the mike to introduce themselves and give a short speech. It is always interesting to hear different legislators from around the state. They each bring large personalities and a great sense of humor. The legislators appreciate the event and are always happy to attend. They never get tired of taking the mike and holding court. The event closes with an attractive door prize drawing.

The Northwestern District's last general membership meeting of the year is usually held in May. This is our continuing education meeting. Like the prior two meetings, the CE meeting is held at a local country club. A business meeting occupies the first 30 minutes. This meeting covers the year's notable events and the progress of dentistry's agenda in the legislature. The meeting also discusses the upcoming GDA summer meeting which is typically held at a beach venue. Once the business meeting concludes, the CE portion of the meeting commences. The CE lecture ranges from clinical dentistry, to self-help, to services offered by the GDA.

LEGISLATION

Throughout the year, in addition to the general membership meetings, the Northwestern District also will conduct Executive Council meetings. These meetings are attended by each committee head. There are approximately 30 committees in the Northwestern District. These meetings are also attended by the

members of the Northwestern District who sit on the GDA Board of Trustees, the American Dental Association delegates, and by delegates and alternate delegates to the Georgia Dental Association. Typically, between 30 and 50 people are in attendance at these Executive Council meetings. The meetings usually last about four hours and are filled with brisk conversation and debate. This is where the rubber meets the road, and all of the business of the Northwestern District is accomplished. There are typically four Executive Council meetings per year. They are a good opportunity to plan and problem solve. Relationships and alliances are formed and nurtured at these meetings. Members with opposing views on an issue are given ample time to discuss and speak their mind. When a decision or consensus cannot be reached, the issue is put to a vote. Once the vote is taken and the prevailing opinion is announced, the parties move on.

One of the biggest planning objectives at the Executive Council meetings is for the District's LAW Day. LAW Day is an annual event in which dentists from the district visit the State Capitol to educate lawmakers on current legislative issues affecting dentistry. LAW Day typically takes place on a Wednesday, between late January and early March. To prepare their respective legislators for LAW Day, contact dentists send them a short

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e-mail or fax to let them know that the event is approaching. At the State Capitol, dentists are greeted by staff from the Georgia Dental Association. They have a nice breakfast and the dentists are briefed by the GDA staff. The briefing consists of reviewing every piece of pertinent legislation that will affect Georgia dentists. The GDA staff then assigns each dentist a legislator to contact at the Capitol. They concentrate on legislators who are involved in certain pertinent legislation and give them extra attention. For example, dentists may focus on a legislator who is on an important committee that will have a direct impact on a particular bill of interest. Following the briefing, the dentists and GDA staff walk to the State Capitol en masse. Before the legislators are called out of chambers, the dentists traditionally take a picture with the governor on the steps of the Capitol. The dentists in attendance will then have a page call the legislators out of chambers.

This is one of the most exciting moments of the day. The State Capitol is full of lobbyists and every imaginable interest group in the state of Georgia. This means that hundreds of people are clamoring to talk to a legislator. Once a legislator comes out of chambers and the page delivers him or her to the waiting dentists, a small group is formed in a corner of the capitol building for discussion. The legislators are very receptive and attentive and enjoy talking with the Georgia dentists. This process has been very effective in letting Georgia legislators know about issues facing dentists in Georgia. We are also fortunate

to have two dentists who currently serve as State Senators. Every GDA member who attends the LAW Day program gets a special commemorative pin.

One great GDA accomplishment this year was the passage of landmark legislation, HB 167 (“Prompt Pay”). HB 167, authored by Rep. Steve Davis (McDonough), adds Third-Party Administrators (TPAs) including those for self-insured ERISA plans. The current Prompt Pay statute excluded TPAs working for ERISA plans. HB 167 requires third-party administrators to pay clean claims in 15 working days for electronically submitted claims and 30 days for written paper claims.

This is the third year that the Medical Association of Georgia and the GDA have championed the Prompt Pay bill. Last year we were successful in getting the prompt pay bill passed by both chambers only to have the bill vetoed by then-Governor Perdue.

The bill’s opponents came out swinging this year, just as they had in previous years. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce, America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), and United HealthCare were the bill’s biggest critics. They vigorously argued that a state law that requires third-party administrators to promptly pay claims is preempted by ERISA, the federal law that governs self-insured plans. Again this year the Georgia Chamber of Commerce made this a “score card” issue. The score card is used to let legislators know that their votes on specific legislation will be reported by the Chamber of Commerce to its membership. Fortunately for the supporters of this legislation, the legislators did not let the threat of the score card influence their vote on what they believe is right.

The House heard arguments from all interested parties and ultimately passed the bill 162 to nine. In a surprising turn

of events, when the bill reached the Senate, it was assigned to the Senate Judiciary Non-Civil Committee, not the Senate Insurance Committee as it was assigned in the House. As it turned out, this was an extraordinary piece of good fortune. The bill received a thorough vetting by the Judiciary Committee on the legal issues presented by both sides of the argument which helped to convince legislators that the Chamber of Commerce's legal position was not persuasive. Again, the contact dentist network sprang into action and was influential in helping to move the legislation through the Judiciary Committee and the Rules Committee to the floor of the Senate for a vote. Despite several additional attempts to block passage of the legislation, late into the evening on the 39th day, the Senate voted 45 to nine in favor of the bill. Since there was a minor amendment to the bill in the Senate, the House had to agree to the change, which they did at 10:45 pm. The bill has since been signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal.

MEMBER BENEFITS

The Georgia Dental Association offers many benefits to its members. One such benefit is Professional Debt Recovery Services. Professional Debt Recovery Services, Inc. (PDRS) was created by GDA dentists to assist dentists dealing with the complex issue of debt recovery. PDRS provides clients with the most effective receivables management solutions. PDRS works exclusively with patient receivables and will provide clients with the assurance that their claims will be handled in a professional manner. GDA also has an extensive portfolio of insurance services called Georgia Dental Insurance Services. Georgia Dental Insurance Services, Inc. (GDIS)

was created in 1995 by GDA dentists to provide reasonably priced, comprehensive insurance products and services to dentists, their staff members, and their family members. The coverage available includes major medical, professional liability, property and casualty, workers' compensation, disability, and life. GDA also makes available a practice finance company for members. Bank of America Practice Solutions serves the dental community by offering customized financial solutions to meet dentists' needs. GDA also offers a credit card processing arrangement with Bank of America.

GDA also has a patient financing arrangement with Care Credit. GDA has an arrangement with CGI Communications which delivers high-impact marketing and promotion products to the dental community, such as streaming One-Click™ Web-based videos, V-Mail™ video emails, or highlight movies. Their SmartConnect service is a communication tool that can connect dentists' business phone, cell phone, website, e-mail, and more. SmartSites are fully functional Web destinations with embedded video, dynamic content, and user interaction. GDA also has an arrangement with The Dental Record. This company's services include online forms patients can download and complete prior to their first visit. GDA also has an arrangement with FedEx which offers special benefits to GDA members. GDA's relationship with InTouch Practice Communications allows participating members to manage their practice with an automated appointment reminder system. InTouch is the only such company endorsed by the ADA and GDA. GDA

also endorses Lands End and LifeLock. Through the GDA's relationship with Officite, members can arrange customized, professional medical and dental Web sites that are easy to set up, easy to maintain and effective at attracting new patients and gaining case acceptance. Since 2002, Officite has worked with more than 4,600 dentists and physicians to create Web sites, implement online marketing campaigns, and integrate practice marketing materials.

GDA has a special relationship with SurePayroll which allows employers to go online and enter employee hours and then have SurePayroll handle the rest, including taxes, direct deposits, and payroll reports. Through GDA's relationship with TransFirst, dental practices can accept credit cards and checks, thereby expanding their ability to assist patients and impact their bottom line. GDA partner UBS Financial Services provides retirement planning and wealth management programs customized for GDA members. GDA members now have access to the Whirlpool Corporation's VIPLINK program and can receive discounts on products from brands such as Whirlpool, KitchenAid, Maytag, and Amana, up to 12 products per year. ■