

#GuidedWellnessRegeneration



## Praise For *Guided Wellness Regeneration*

“In this profession, as high-powered achievers, we often compromise aspects of our well-being for success. Dr. Cathy Hung brilliantly taps into the readers’ inner core of emotion and strength through sharing a myriad of her own and other professionals’ heartfelt personal experiences. Dr. Hung’s *Guided Wellness Regeneration* is a compassionate, insightful, and emotionally comforting guide to reset and regain self, inner peace, wellness, balance, and purpose in our journeys. This book is a must-have tool to refer to on any given day!”

—**Renée M. Arace, DMD, FACD,**

New Jersey Dental Association, the 154th Past President

“Dr. Cathy Hung provides a much-needed resource for dentists and dental health professionals in her most recent book, *Guided Wellness Regeneration*. To date, there has not been any publication to adequately and comprehensively address the wellness topics considered thoroughly in her thoughtful work. This volume will become an essential and helpful text for all dentists to read and reference at any stage in their career. The personal reflections and stories that illustrate the text allow the reader to understand that we are not going down our paths alone, attempting to balance professional responsibility and personal health and well-being. Many successful dentists and respected dental leaders have faced similar obstacles and battles that we all commonly face quietly and alone. Bravely sharing these stories with us allows us to reflect on our own journeys and encourages us to persevere on our paths, knowing that we are all forging forward together.”

—**Jason E. Portnof, DMD, MD, FACS, FACD, FICD,**

Vice President, American Dental Society of Anesthesiology,

President of the Florida Dental Society of Anesthesiology,

President, Palm Beach County Dental Association,

Past president, Florida Society of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons,

Past President, Florida Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association

“In *Guided Wellness Regeneration*, Dr. Cathy Hung has gathered a collection of stories that shed incredible light on the fact that dentistry is a wonderful and meaningful profession that may come with some serious “side effects”. The stories told here are timely since mental health issues have finally become something to talk about and not remain hidden in the shadows of the pandemic.

Most facets of dentistry are represented in these chapters, and there is literally something for everyone in this book. I hope dental students or those early in their careers take advantage of the enormous amount of solid advice that is presented here, from those who know. The saying “If you know, you know” is paramount here. The authors have walked the walk and are now talking the talk, and we should *all* listen!

The name itself says it all: as friends, colleagues, mentors, and mentees, we can all help each other towards improved well-being.”

—**Janis B. Moriarty, DMD,**

Chair of the Massachusetts Dental Society Foundation,  
Past President of the Massachusetts Dental Society

“Many of us can relate to the residual trauma of the education process, including the cost and the double-booked feeling of pressures of non-chairside dental-related responsibilities, like leading or managing a team and business. We are united by an amazing achievement—we are dentists. Regardless of practice type or whether chairside, we collaborate with our teams, leveraging the knowledge we’ve gained to positively impact many patients, ultimately contributing to an even bigger collective achievement.

Similarly, we all have that aspect of well-being determined by expectations in our non-dentist lives. As a child, parent, sibling, spouse, or friend, it sometimes feels impossible to include time and grace for healing ourselves.

It is through Cathy's carefully curated content and the vulnerability of our colleagues' stories that I see a consistent theme of a possible call to action. Inclusion is something that if we were to all support, we would ultimately affect our profession positively and lessen the chances of traumatic experiences of our colleagues and teams. There is a lot to learn from others' stories, and there's a sense of validation in knowing that others may have had similar experiences, not necessarily positive ones. For me and my personal journey, this book validates that we must channel our experiences to empower one another to make dentistry inclusive, look around, and invite someone in."

—**Hana Alberti, DDS,**

Vice President, Dental Practice, American Dental Association,  
Center of Excellence, Dental Care & Financing & Continuing Education

"In today's world, marked by growing chaos, uncertainty, and a troubling decline in empathy, the mental health and wellness of individuals, especially healthcare providers, are more critical than ever. The challenges extend beyond the healthcare landscape, as many navigate a society where instability, unkindness, and disconnection have become increasingly common. Within this environment, rising rates of burnout, substance use, and emotional distress have underscored the urgent need for support systems that prioritize wellness, resilience, and human connection. Now more than ever, dental professionals need spaces that foster compassion, reflection, and the tools to thrive despite the pressures of both their work and the world around them.

Dr. Cathy Hung's book *Guided Wellness Regeneration* offers a timely and powerful response to this need. Through compelling narratives and lived experiences, the book provides a mirror for healthcare professionals to reflect on their own wellness journeys. It defines wellness in a multidimensional way, exploring the barriers, risks, and facilitators that affect professionals across disciplines, including dental and behavioral health.

The stories shared are not only relatable but also deeply humanizing, offering hope, connection, and practical strategies for self-care. The inclusion of peer-support examples highlights how shared vulnerability can foster strength and community. The book encourages honest conversations about stigma, mental health, and the importance of seeking help—topics often avoided in clinical settings. By promoting self-reflection, compassion, and action, this book empowers healthcare professionals to create wellness personally and professionally and support one another. It is a valuable resource for educators, students, and practitioners.”

—**Margaret (Peggy) Swarbrick, PhD, FAOTA,**

ScarletWell Director,

Associate Director, Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies,

Research Professor, Graduate School of Applied and Professional

Psychology, Rutgers University

*Foreword by Dr. J. David Johnson, AAOMS Past President  
Featuring Dr. Brett Kessler, ADA 161st President*

# Guided *Wellness* Regeneration

Resources, Advice, And  
Stories On Wellness  
For Dental Professionals

Authored and Edited by  
Dr. Cathy Hung with Contributors



## Guided *Wellness* Regeneration

Resources, Advice, And Stories On Wellness For Dental Professionals

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ISBN: 978-1-966168-68-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026905852

Designed by Melissa Farr, Back Porch Creative, LLC

HEALTH AUTHORITY BOOKS.

2511 WOODLANDS WAY

OCEANSIDE, CA 92054

[www.healthauthoritybooks.com](http://www.healthauthoritybooks.com)

Health Authority Books in an imprint of Indie Books International, Inc.

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*To anyone who has ever suffered in silence*

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*My COVID pet Fiona at the Buttermilk Falls State Park, New York*

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## Foreword

**T**he first chapter of this book begins with one of my favorite quotations, “Life is bristling with thorns, and I know no other remedy than to cultivate one’s garden.” The words guided, wellness, and regeneration can be easily associated with gardening. Voltaire wrote, “*Il faut cultiver notre jardin.*” To me, “We must cultivate our garden” does not just mean that we should keep a safe distance between ourselves and the world. More than this, it means that, as we surround ourselves with loved ones, we should develop our talents and abilities.

The garden of Dr. Cathy Hung is vast. She is an exceptional surgeon, a gifted pianist, an effective translator between Mandarin and English, a loving wife and mother, and a skillful author and teacher who helps us to recognize better and celebrate our differences and cheer one another on.

When I consider the obstacles Dr. Hung has overcome in culture, language, and gender, I am humbled. I realize how easily I could be “the frog sitting at the bottom of the well,” who looks up and mistakenly thinks the sky above is the entire horizon. Cathy has helped me to widen my perspective. That she lives without limits is partly the result of her father’s guidance. In Cathy’s words, “I was never told that I couldn’t.”

Dr. Hung's intelligence, kindness, tenacity, and energy have been inspirational to me. She has helped me attune to the variations in persons and better understand divergent viewpoints and challenges. Each opportunity to read or hear the words of Dr. Hung provides a window to greater awareness.

In this book, Dr. Hung explores wellness topics for dental professionals through the stories and interviews of dental leaders. Her insights on the genuine and profoundly intimate testimonies in this book provide a path to the joy, peace, and love of personal wellness, as well as a bridge from personal to organizational wellness. Dr. Hung reveals to the reader important lessons on how to tend the garden of our lives. To “cultivate our garden” is to live life as a practice of our authentic spirit. Cathy Hung is authentic. Her call to regenerative wellness echoes the call of Voltaire.

Cathy is drawn to the area of Sedona, Arizona. I like to picture her at the top of the red rocks she loves so much, holding her treasured “broken, yet still beautiful” shell (the image of which is shared at the end of this book), and “living her best day, every day.” Wherever she happens to be, the happy-go-lucky little girl from her grandparents' garden will be deep within her.

**James David Johnson Jr., DDS**

Past President, American Association of Oral  
and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS)



## Special Message

I came to the United States from Peru with my mother to pursue the American dream. I left her to attend Fairleigh Dickinson University dental school, which was very demanding. I often felt that I had no one to turn to until Willy and I met in dental school and got married two years after graduation. We opened a practice together, and we felt that we needed to work seven days a week. There was hardly any family time.

As I transitioned to private practice and started a business from scratch, it did not take that long to realize that I needed to learn business skills. Dentistry was the easy part, but dealing with team members, patients, and insurance claims proved to be challenging, and the business side of dentistry was the most stressful aspect of the practice. My stress turned into burnout, and impostor syndrome took over many times.

When Dan, our first son, was born, we continued with the demanding schedule and did not spend enough time with our baby until July 22, 1995, when our second son, Luis, was born with a critical condition. Our lives stopped. Luis was in the hospital for six months. Thankfully, by the time Luis was one, the doctor said that he would be free to lead a normal life. Luis taught us that dentistry could be our passion, but never our sole purpose.

Now, as a professor at Rutgers Dental School, I have the compassion and discipline to guide my students toward a school-life balance. I can see myself in them, and without judgment, I strive to ensure they have a positive learning experience.

Serving as an American Dental Association Wellness Ambassador along with Dr. Cathy Hung, our goal is to bridge all the resources our local, state, and national organizations have to offer. My involvement in leadership, on my way to the presidency of the New Jersey Dental Association, gives me a vision to promote wellness on a larger scale, starting with self-care, and extending to our families, patients, and tripartite members.

*We are as good to our patients and families as we are to ourselves when we are healthy.*

**Maria Ambrosio, DMD**

American Dental Association Wellness Ambassador  
Treasurer, New Jersey Dental Association  
Secretary, Hispanic Dental Association, NJ Chapter  
Assistant Professor, Rutgers School of Dental Medicine



# Introduction

*Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.*

HARUKI MURAKAMI

When I was listening to Dr. Nazlie Taheri, an oral and maxillofacial surgery (OMS) resident at UCSF, Fresno, speaking to the audience at the inaugural University Of Pacific “Women in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Symposium” on October 10, 2024, about her journey of pursuing a surgical career, I got goose bumps down my arms as she succinctly narrated her story in a slideshow.

Dr. Taheri discussed how she reached an emotional low when she was not accepted into an OMS residency program at the first attempt, and how my book, *Behind Her Scalpel*, came out at the perfect moment to help motivate her to reapply.

There it was, my book cover on her slide deck, displayed to the audience in the room full of students, residents, and faculty members. I tried to keep my composure, but I was trembling inside. I could not have taken credit for her excellence in matching her dream program. If anything, my book served as a catalyst, like a shot of vitamin B.

## Wounded Healer

Carl Jung coined the term *wounded healer*, an archetype adopted from Greek mythology. Chiron, wounded by Hercules' arrow, remained immortal and healed many others before surrendering his immortality to Prometheus. Jung proposed that only the wounded can heal, as others' wounds activate their own.

In a way, listening to Dr. Taheri's narratives was therapeutic to my past wounds, and our roles as analyst and analyzed constellated in juxtaposition as we learned about each other's stories and healed each other in return.

In a world of illness, it is a privilege to be in a position to help others recover. A book, in my opinion, is a great way to serve this purpose because it is economical and portable.

## Unprecedented Time

In summer 2020, I desperately secured a shipment of disposable gowns online. They came overwhelmingly oversized and somehow lined the underside like a plastic tablecloth.

With a face shield and an N95 mask layered with another level 2 mask, I was heat-exhausted, Saran-wrapped by this awful gown, and drenched with sweat dripping down my back. When I stripped off my gown, I could feel the droplets of my sweat flying off. My face shield was fogging up. I could no longer see properly, and I couldn't breathe under two layers of masks.

I finished the case and started to feel dizzy—mind you, even throughout my two pregnancies, working to the end of the eighth month, standing up all day, I had never felt so uncomfortable. I sat down to check my vitals. My blood pressure and pulse were sky high, and my oxygen saturation was low.

I sat there with an oxygen mask for a few minutes until I felt better. I remember thinking to myself: There's got to be a better way of doing this. I can't work like this much longer. The threat of not being able to

practice further stressed me out. I felt very isolated, soaked in sweat, out of breath, and my back was throbbing as the herniated discs popped. I felt defeated.

Some of the docs in my area, including some of my referrals, sold their practice and retired early. Overhead expenses had increased steadily despite the pandemic. There was a shortage of raw materials to make nitrile gloves. Reimbursement went down. More claims are denied. I dropped some insurance plans. There was staff turnover. The only constant was change, and I thought I could not be the only one going through all of this discomfort.

So when Dr. Hana Alberti, now American Dental Association (ADA) Vice President of Dental Practice, approached me with the opportunity to be one of the first cohort Wellness Ambassadors, a new initiative supported by the Dental Team Wellness Advisory Committee (DWAC) of the Council on Dental Practice of the ADA, I did not hesitate to become part of it. Gaining knowledge about wellness enables me to assist others better. I am putting on my own oxygen mask first.

## **Dental Journalism And Why I Wrote This Book**

Two years ago, when Dr. Brett Kessler visited the New Jersey Dental Association, I asked to pick his brain for an important presentation that I was working on.

My slide deck was overabundant. When we finished the slide deck, he was overwhelmed, and I was exhausted. After a long pause, he said, “Make the presentation shorter, and put the rest into a book.”

Although my brain was depleted after publishing *Behind Her Scalpel*, the positive feedback from readers sprouted the idea of writing another book, this time in the realm of wellness. Dr. Kessler’s words further propelled me to write another book. I love stories, and I think in dialogues, movie frames, and background music. After my onboarding year as a first cohort Wellness Ambassador, I felt ready to write again. So here we are.

## **The Concept Of Guided Wellness Regeneration**

A patient came in for a consultation regarding an extraction and bone graft, a routine procedure in my practice. As I explained to the patient how guided bone regeneration would work, it occurred to me that the enhanced outcome, based on basic human physiology, was essentially boosting our body's existing wound-healing process. To be well and stay well, we need that little extra oomph from the biologics.

This wellness resource book functions on the principles of guided regeneration. The resources are already there. We just need proper conduits to facilitate our healing process.

The ADA's *New Dentist Now* blog has provided me with a platform to contribute to since my time as part of the ADA's Institute for Diversity in Leadership program (now known as the ADA Leadership Institutes). Although the days of being a new dentist were long behind me, I was allowed a safe space to tell my stories on a professional public forum. I have since discovered my love for dental journalism, having dabbled in several interview articles with my dental colleagues over the years. I decided to join the American Association of Dental Editors and Journalists to help expand my horizons. I have always enjoyed the intimacy of "Barbara-Waltering" someone. It is fresh, raw, and vulnerable, and many interviewees have told me that they find the interview process itself to be therapeutic.

## Narrative Medicine: Healing Through Storytelling<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

Narrative medicine is an art of practice that addresses patients' concerns about their previous traumatic experiences through communication skills, such as active listening, asking exploratory questions, and storytelling with empathy. Narrative medicine is a significant component of daily dental practice. The minute a patient sits down and tells you about bad dental experiences, such as poor bedside manner, insufficient anesthesia during a procedure, a series of disappointing experiences, a particular traumatic experience, or complications, most trained professionals would try to comfort and reassure the patient. The exploratory questions we might ask could be: "Tell me more," "What worries you the most?" or "How do you feel?" to develop rapport via curiosity, care, and clear communication. The doctor can also participate in sharing stories about their own experiences. Narrative medicine is said to be intrinsically beneficial to the patients.

Dr. Annie Brewster, author of *The Healing Power of Storytelling: Using Personal Narrative to Navigate Illness, Trauma, and Loss*, was struck with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis during her medical residency. Initially in denial, she was frustrated by the healthcare system's difficulty in allowing patients to be heard. It wasn't until she had to break the same diagnosis to one of her patients that, revealing her own history, she came to terms with it by telling her story and claimed peace.

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- 1 Loy, Michelle, and Rachel Kowalsky. 2024. "Narrative Medicine: The Power of Shared Stories to Enhance Inclusive Clinical Care, Clinician Well-Being, and Medical Education." *The Permanente Journal* 28 (2): 93–101. <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/23.116>.
  - 2 Brewster, Annie. *The Healing Power of Storytelling: Using Personal Narrative to Navigate Illness, Trauma, and Loss*. With Rachel Zimmerman. North Atlantic Books, 2022.
  - 3 Muneeb, et al. 2017. "The Art of Healing Through Narrative Medicine in Clinical Practice: A Reflection." *The Permanente Journal* 21 (4): 17-013. <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/17-013>.
  - 4 Zaharias, George. 2018. "What Is Narrative-Based Medicine? Narrative-Based Medicine 1." *Canadian Family Physician* 64 (3).

Narrative medicine is a “pedagogical framework that acknowledges and honors individual and collective narratives in the clinical and academic contexts.”<sup>5</sup> Exercises such as reflective writing or drawing practiced between doctors and patients in the form of narratives help to improve the doctor-patient relationship. Narrative medicine can serve as a self-care tool for clinicians to enhance their well-being and build resilience.

Storytelling in this book is accomplished through narrative medicine, in the form of Q&A sessions or self-narrated stories. Writing this book has been an educational, enriching, and healing journey for me, and I encourage everyone to explore their own story through any medium that feels comfortable, whether you decide to share it with the world or not. Through collective storytelling, we heal as a community.

## **Inclusive Culture And Wellness**

Inclusive culture promotes and sustains wellness. Diversity equates to the existence of individual identity, an amalgamation of our innate qualities and lived experiences that shape and form a sense of self. An inclusive culture that embraces such diversity helps foster a sense of belonging among community members. When microaggressions, stereotypes, and discrimination threaten our sense of identity, we become unwell.

The benefits of building an inclusive work environment are irrefutable, backed by years of research. A continued goal to create an inclusive culture where different voices can be heard without fear of retaliation will eventually lead to collective healing and wellness.

## **How This Book Is Structured And How To Use It**

In the past few years, our profession has lost many colleagues, both indirectly and directly, due to the pandemic, making the need for self-care evident. Just like the guided regeneration principle, I hope

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<sup>5</sup> Loy and Kowalsky, 93

the information in this book works like the biologics to help heal our bodies, minds, and spirits by signaling and scaffolding the right way.

Part I of this book navigates wellness versus unwellness and different facets of unwellness, including stress and burnout, mental and physical illnesses, substance use and misuse, suicidality, and terminal illnesses. Many theories, classifications, guidelines, and conceptual models of interest can provide insight into the root causes of these problems.

Part II addresses the challenges the present world faces, exploring strategies from individual to organizational and institutional levels, with the aim of healing and recovery, ultimately seeking to build personal and organizational resilience and foster post-traumatic growth.

Each chapter begins with evidence-based research on relevant topics and concludes with an interview or a story. As a certified life coach, I have also formulated exploratory questions, serving as “checkpoints” throughout the book, to facilitate your self-reflection and inner conversations. A coach does not fix you by telling you what to do, but helps you look within yourself by asking questions and allowing self-exploration in a safe space. I hope my coaching background can help you get started on the journey of wellness.

The appendices provide additional resources, including hyperlinks, phone numbers, and a list of readings. I have compiled a list of buzzwords, concepts, and theories that may be of interest to you.

The book’s content draws references from various disciplines and doctrines, including medicine, surgery, dentistry, nursing, with a strong emphasis on behavioral sciences, psychology, sociology, and public health. This book aims to provide theoretical foundations for concepts related to wellness, enabling you to explore further through reading and seeking help for your self-interest.

Although I have included several criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) in the chapter on mental illnesses, this book does not serve as a diagnostic tool for

any conditions or diseases; instead, it aims to provide understanding, provoke self-reflection, and offer background information as a starting point for further exploration.

I hope that you will be able to apply this knowledge in your personal life and, if you are a key policymaker, use these resources to help build wellness initiatives for your organization. Lastly, I hope you find comfort and inspiration in the narratives of others.

“What do I want to do for the remainder of my time in this world?” This question surfaces frequently.

In the past few years, I have explored different ways to find joy through creative outlets. As both of my Gen Z children step into the workforce, it becomes increasingly apparent that I want to devote my remaining time on Earth to serving as a messenger through writing, my original instrument.

I began reading my first language, traditional Chinese, at the tender age of three, and started journaling at the age of six. English is my second language, and it is far from perfect. I have a slight accent that will stay with me, reminding me of where I came from, and I occasionally make grammatical mistakes and spelling errors. However, I hope that this should not diminish my message, as language serves merely as a bridge, but the quest for joy, peace, and love is a perpetually universal one. Wellness has no borders and is unequivocally sought by all.

The final passage of chapter 12 is a brief memoir, a snapshot of my childhood growing up in Taiwan. I recalled a period when I lived with my grandparents, which remained the happiest time of my early childhood. After I wrote it in English, I couldn't help but also narrate it in my original language, traditional Chinese, for that represented my most authentic voice. I thought that would do me the honor of ending my last chapter.

*Reach out if you need help. You are not alone, and there is hope.*



*Cape May Beach at sunrise.*



Part I

---

**Are We Well?**





## Chapter 1

# Wellness And Well-being

*Life is bristling with thorns, and I know no other remedy  
than to cultivate one's garden.*

VOLTAIRE

**H**elping professions are burning out. The work-life balance, the pandemic, the reduced insurance reimbursement, the increased administration time: The hamsters on the wheel want to get off but can't, or don't know how. This chapter begins with discussions on current wellness and well-being initiatives in dentistry and medicine, and differentiates the two similar but different constructs: wellness and well-being.

The concept of wellness dates back to Dr. Halbert Dunn's work in his 1959 article titled "High-Level Wellness For Man and Society," where he defined the conceptualization of positive health. He proposed viewing health as a continuum of intersection between the "health axis" and the "environmental axis," where "high-level wellness" exists as the upper right quadrant of the grid. Western culture, he said, fragmented the study of man into the body, the mind, and the spirit. However, harmony cannot be achieved without the unity of the three.

Dunn also postulated ways to quantify positive health by measuring biochemical, functional, and psychological tests and employing

susceptibility indexes and precursors-of-disease indexes for those likely to be unwell.<sup>1</sup> Dunn's work has laid a foundation for wellness models in modern literature.

## The ADA Wellness Ambassador Program

The ADA's *2021 Dentist Well-Being Survey Report*, conducted during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, found that the percentage of dentists diagnosed with anxiety had more than tripled (from 5 percent in 2003 to 16 percent in 2021).<sup>2</sup> Sixty-three percent of dentists surveyed reported having experienced at least one medical condition, such as back issues (27 percent), elevated cholesterol (16 percent), anxiety (16 percent), depression (13 percent), headaches (12 percent), or arthritis (10 percent).<sup>3</sup> Other findings include lower perceived self-competence, especially in women and those under forty.<sup>4</sup>

The Dental Team Wellness Advisory Committee (DWAC) of the Council on Dental Practice of the ADA, created the Wellness Ambassador program, overseen by Dr. Hana Alberti, formerly senior director of the Center for Dental Policy of the ADA Practice Institute, and Ms. Felicia Bloom, now the manager of dental team health and well-being of the Center for Dental Practice Policy. The purpose of the ADA Wellness Ambassador program is for the ambassadors to help:

- Expand the awareness of physical and mental health wellness and well-being challenges faced in the dental profession
- Prioritize the need to provide resources at the state and local levels to those who may seek help

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1 Dunn, Halbert L.. 1959. "High-Level Wellness for Man and Society." *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health* 49 (6): 786–792. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.49.6.786>.

2 American Dental Association. 2021 Dentist Well-Being Survey Report. American Dental Association, 2022: 12.

3 American Dental Association, 2021 Dentist Well-Being: 11.

4 American Dental Association, 2021 Dentist Well-Being: 9.

- Connect those who need support to available resources<sup>5</sup>

I had the fortune to participate in the first cohort of Wellness Ambassadors in 2022. I helped drive a wellness initiative for the New Jersey Dental Association (NJDA), and we now have a well-being committee, thanks to the support from the NJDA leadership. The Wellness Ambassador program has three cohorts to date. We do not serve as therapists, but rather help relay wellness resources from the national level to the state and local levels as part of continuous efforts to support dentists who may be struggling with various issues concerning their well-being.

### **The ADA Health And Well-Being Summit, 2023**

On September 8, 2023, the ADA Health and Well-Being Summit took place in the ADA Chicago headquarters. The Council on Dental Practice had “determined the need to elevate the conversation around these efforts through convening a strategic meeting that fostered dialogue between stakeholders in dentistry and established a coalition of partners.”<sup>6</sup> Leaders from all districts and specialty professional societies, including the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), the American Student Dental Association (ASDA), and the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), also attended the summit, which consisted of three expert panel discussions and reports from the first cohort Wellness Ambassadors.

Among dental panel experts, Dr. Brett Kessler expressed the ADA’s position on supporting the well-being of the health workforce. He urged

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5 American Dental Association and Julie Spaniel. n.d. *Steps to Developing a Wellness Ambassador Program in Your State or Local Dental Society*. Resources from ADA basecamp for Wellness Ambassadors.

6 American Dental Association. Updated October 3, 2023. “ADA Health and Well-Being Summit.” American Dental Association: 1. [https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/practice/wellness-ambassador-program/ADA\\_Health\\_and\\_Well-Being\\_Summit\\_\\_Executive\\_S.pdf](https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/practice/wellness-ambassador-program/ADA_Health_and_Well-Being_Summit__Executive_S.pdf).

destigmatizing mental health, citing it as the most significant barrier to providers seeking help. Dr. Robert McNeill, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon serving as a Texas state board regulator, emphasized that all stakeholders should collaborate to address mental health issues, as “a practitioner’s safety issue is a direct patient safety issue.”

Dr. Alan Budd, director of Dentists Concerned for Dentists of Massachusetts and the National Council of Dentist Health Programs, discussed options to help dental professionals experiencing substance use, mental health, or behavioral health conditions, including different types of healthcare professional assistance programs and stigma-preventing providers. Some of the barriers, Dr. Budd said, that prevented dental professionals from signing up for these assistance programs include not being aware of a problem, not being aware of a solution, personality (I got this), shame and fear, distrust of the program’s competency and/or confidentiality, or the healthcare professional choosing an alternate pathway to recovery.

Medical experts from the Federation of State Physician Health Programs (FSPHP), the American Medical Association, and the Joint Commission further discussed physician health programs serving dentists, currently operating in twenty-eight states in total. The State of Washington was highlighted as a model that had successfully reformed licensure questions and aided health professionals in reducing or eliminating fees to physician health programs.

A third panel of experts highlighted successes from three dental associations: Minnesota (Minnesota Health Professional Services Program), North Carolina (North Carolina Caring Dental Professionals), and South Dakota (South Dakota Dental Association Be Well Program).

## AAOMS Cares: Being Well Together<sup>7,8</sup> At AAOMS's Regional And State Leadership Conference

Dr. Mark A. Egbert, then-president of AAOMS, stated during a panel discussion at the June 2024 AAOMS Regional and State Leadership Conference that, during his term, “AAOMS is prioritizing wellness.” The panel discussion focused on AAOMS Cares: Being Well Together, a confidential wellness program by a third party to aid oral and maxillofacial surgeons (OMS) who experience substance use disorder (SUD). Rodrigo Garcia, the program director of the Parkdale Center for Professionals in Indiana, shared stories and statistics on SUD with approximately eighty OMS society leaders and executive staff members at the leadership conference. Members who need help may call the AAOMS Cares helpline at **888-462-2706**.

### Wellness Versus Well-Being

There is no one unified definition of wellness and well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines *well-being* as “a positive state experienced by individuals and societies.” Moreover, WHO emphasizes that well-being is a “resource for daily life” that “encompasses quality of life” and “the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world . . . with a sense of meaning and purpose.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1948, the WHO defined *wellness* as “a complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The word *complete* drew criticism as being Utopianistic and

7 American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. Accessed September 28, 2024. “AAOMS Cares: Being Well Together.” American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. <https://www.aaoms.org/member-center/aaoms-cares?ct=c0c101972e5503446c90247ad8793d0cb0239453913ecf800cfb1b6085515ca603528d2a0d12d1ec5a54f6ec2a14542d5dba7112c179e9050b2d91ce636a45c9>.

8 American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. 2024. “AAOMS’s Wellness Program Takes Center Stage at Regional and State Leadership Conference.” *AAOMS Today* 22 (5): 26–27.

9 World Health Organization. *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021*. World Health Organization, 2021.