

Dental: Response to 'Rolling with the Punches'

Services are available for dental providers: Help you find issues you may be having in your office and make your practice YOUR vision.

Services are available for dental consumers: Helping you figure out how to get dental care, what are your options and answer the question 'what do I do now?'

Free complimentary telephone consultation to see what you need help with and share how I can help you. Email Dr. Jeanette Gallagher at drj@outoftheboxhealthcare.com.

Below is an article I wrote many years ago which describes how I feel about the dental hygiene profession. It is my opinion and the original article is available below.

RDH Magazine: Readers' Forum

Nov 1, 2003

Serve those in need with compassion by Jeanette Gallagher

Dear RDH:

I am writing in reference to the article, "Rolling with the Punches" ("New Heights" column, September 2003). I spoke with you previously concerning my personal disgust with that article and hope there are other dental hygienists who are not as idealistic and superior as to refer to this large growing percentage of the population as this author did.

I am a dental hygienist of 30 years, a graduate of Loyola University in New Orleans and now a naturopathic physician/doctor of natural medicine. My training at Loyola provided a sound commitment to working with people without regard to their financial circumstances. The training included walking the streets of New Orleans, searching for people who would be gracious enough for us to "practice" our skills on them. These people were more than thankful we cared enough to ask them. We provided a positive community service. As a student in a Jesuit college, I learned how to stress compassion for all people, their souls, and their location on the path in life.

To the writer of the article — who made references about the "Medicaid" practices and "baby factory" as issues for her — I would like to thank her for not working in these practices. Throughout my career of three decades in medical and dental settings, my hands, my heart, and my compassion help these people with their current health issues, provide insight for support, and listen to a soul as they share. Never, ever did I regard people to follow an ideal of perfection that "I" set up or something I deemed "should" be the way of life.

There are several aspects to be considered:

Respect for all people wherever they are in life. You are not here to judge them or their circumstances. Many hygienists or dental assistants may also be a paycheck away from assistance, or currently on "system" benefits. Do you know their circumstances? How do you treat them? Are they taking advantage of the system?

Provide compassion, listen to them, support them, and lend information that may assist them in finding or shifting life's choices. Look at your self-portrayal image: Where are you in the ladder of life, and does that really work for you?

Stop putting a label on the Medicaid population or the offices that service them. You need to review just what constitutes a person on Medicaid, low-income families, Healthy Kids programs, homeless families, and requirements to get any medical or dental help of any kind.

Praise the offices that are helping these patients. They are not making millions by offering these services, but they are fulfilling a community need.

Maybe if hygienists took five hours per month and volunteered to work for these offices, the overhead of the office, the supply and demand ratio, the performance and morale of the office staff and the quality of care would raise to unheard of heights. By the way, are you sure the offices you recommend for quality dental or medical care do not help this population? How would that serve your ideals of what the practices should provide? Or the quality of care you hold as ideal?

I have been in all types of practices, ranging from the million dollar profits to community based care. I also used my corporate dental skills to work for Dental Network of America, a national provider relations company, and Three River Health Plans in Pennsylvania, as provider relations for the Medicaid population. I went to hundreds of dental offices in the eastern part of the state, both rural and urban, to credential dentists and their offices to provide care for the lower income and Medicaid participants.

I did OSHA inspections, quality of care, performance reviews and licensing requirement inspections. Many offices initially would refuse to accept the overwhelming population in their community; however, through community support and my encouragement, I did sign on several dentists who agreed to accept a limited number of new patients per month, therefore sharing the load amongst several practitioners. Limits were arranged for the offices in number of patients — also for helping people within a designated number of miles in the office radius. When approached correctly and compassionately, some dental practices are very open to the opportunity, and they see the benefits of helping others.

If you feel you cannot offer these attributes, please do not service these people.

Remove yourself from offices that do.

Do not blame burnout as a reason to leave.

Look at what your place is in society. How you can give help to those in need?

Look around you and in the offices you go to for health care — do you really know how they pay?

Praise the offices that do provide these services, and report others to the Medicaid offices if they provide substandard quality of care. No one deserves to be hurt by human hands, no matter how much the patient can afford.

How can I say all these things and yet be reputable in saying them? I have been there in all aspects. I have been a mother of four children, a previous Medicaid recipient after a divorce. I have been a Healthy Children recipient while being a single parent and working full time at a dental practice in Pennsylvania, and as a medical student for six years with four minor children.

My ideal is to work with people and enrich their lives with compassion and insight. Can we all attest to doing that to our fullest?

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Originally posted here: *Rolling with the Punches 2003*

About the Author



Dr. Jeanette Gallagher, ND is a Naturopath who has been in healthcare for more than 43 years in various positions and education.

Dr. Jeanette helps people who are not well or feel that something is not right, showing them how to be a participant in their healthcare and disease process. The goal is to minimize complications from incomplete records or communication, decrease stress or fear in making hard choices, improve health and quality of life by better personal choices.

She shows you how to support your healthcare provider by providing information consistently and completely about your health so there are less questions or gaps in your care.

She is a former dental hygienist, current patient advocate and mother of four grown children. Over the decades she has encountered many personal and health crises' in her life to learn what works and what does not. Dr. Jeanette is also a super caregiver and can share what it takes to help others.