



# With a Little Help From My Friends

With all the podcasts I've done, the issue of suicide and mental health in dentistry has come up many times. I'm told by experts in the field that suicide and mental health is related to comorbidity; it's usually not a single thing that makes someone snap. A lot of stats say that 80 percent of addicts, whether it be alcohol, opioids or something else, have undiagnosed mental health issues. The stress we face in dentistry can be intense and undeniable and, at times, feels insurmountable.

You've heard everyone say, "The doctor who treats himself has a fool for a patient." Many docs think that a lot of their depression comes from dentistry being a stressful or thankless job. For starters, all day long patients come in and say they hate coming to see you. Meanwhile, you have all this student loan debt and the pressure of running a business when you most likely just wanted to practice dentistry.

When you're a dentist, you see the dark side of humans. They're scared about the shot, they're scared about the cost, they're unhappy about being in your chair, and all you want to do is help them feel better. That's the theme of the day for nearly every dentist out there. I've been here in Phoenix for 30 years and every single year, at least one dentist has killed him- or herself. Sometimes it's two or three a year. It must stop. The solution is there, but like most answers to complicated questions, while it might seem simple, it never is. First, we need to start taking better care of ourselves. Second, we need to be willing to ask for help, and to provide that help for others.

We've all been guilty of not providing even close to a healthy amount of self-care. I mean that we abuse ourselves through our diets or lack of exercise. Wake up in the morning and have a cigarette and Red Bull breakfast or stand in line at Starbucks. Then for lunch—if we



## See p. 32 for a message board about suicide and mental health

After learning that one of his old dental school classmates committed suicide, a Townie comes to the boards to start an open and frank discussion about depression and dentistry.

even take one—we're shoveling garbage into our mouths.

This is what we do to ourselves, then wonder why we feel tired, down or burned out. Then we drag ourselves home—maybe stop by the bar first for a happy hour that's never happy, continue drinking once you're in your living room, knocking back a few cocktails in the privacy of your home, and then right before bed eat your biggest meal of the day. It's one bad decision after another that all starts with the stresses found in our profession.

I hope all of you check out a couple of message board threads on Dentaltown. The first one is "How to Really Get Into Great Shape." You don't have to go there and be interested in finding some amazing workout routines (although there are plenty of them). The point of viewing that thread is to see how many docs are trying to turn things around and focus on taking care of themselves and each other. It's an amazing example of the kind of anonymous support system that helps doctors not fall off the wagon. It's one of the things about Dentaltown I'm most proud of.

The other thread, "Suicide and Mental Health,"



by Howard Farran, DDS, MBA, publisher, *Dentaltown* magazine

we feature in this issue (see p. 32). So far that message board has racked up a whopping 665 posts in its first seven weeks. I want to say a couple of things about that. First, off, it was Dr. Rella Christensen who told me to allow people to post anonymously on Dentaltown. It was a big-time debate in our early years—and a debate that continues, but I'm confident in the decision we've made.

When Christiansen explained why she thought Dentaltown needed to be a nameless forum, she said, "There's got to be an anonymous

place where a dentist can ask a stupid question." Imagine you're an endodontist, she said, and you want to post a failed root canal and ask for help ... but all your referrals are looking at it. Plus, some devious competing dentist could email that thread to everybody. A failed case is one thing; imagine if the same happened involving a post about suicide and mental health.

I am so proud that we stuck to our values, that the profession of dentistry was more important to Dentaltown. Oscar Wilde nailed it when he said, "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth." Nearly everywhere else on the internet, anonymity can mean intense hate speak and criticism. But on Dentaltown, it has become a tool that docs are using in the most constructive and helpful ways possible. Let's keep at it.

*Whether you find help by reading about a new exercise and diet a doc is trying out, by sharing some of the dark thoughts in your mind, or by answering someone in need, us looking after each other is what will make the biggest difference in our profession.*

It's impossible to know how many difficult conversations would not have been possible without an opportunity to post anonymously. Not just troubling cases that so many docs have received advice on throughout the years, but the topics that truly matter: health, sanity, stress and, yes, suicide.

If you're having thoughts about suicide or mental health issues, and you need a place to go and talk about it, a place where you can post anonymously if you want, without any fear or scrutiny, do it here on Dentaltown. You're not alone out there! Whether you find help by reading about a new exercise and diet a doc is trying out, by sharing some of the dark thoughts in your mind, or by answering someone in need, us looking after each other is what will make the biggest difference in our profession.

Be good to yourself, take care of yourself and be there for the doc next door, too. ■



### In our next issue: Why exercise is important

Dr. Jason Luchtefeld, Dentaltown's live events CE director, discusses the benefits of exercise and fitness in an article that will appear in our January 2018 issue.

## > See Howard Live!

**Howard Farran, DDS, MBA**, is an international speaker who has written books and dozens of articles. To schedule Howard to speak at your next national, state or local dental meeting, email [rebecca@farranmedia.com](mailto:rebecca@farranmedia.com).

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