



ALABAMA
ACADEMY of
GENERAL DENTISTRY FALL 2025

Composite

Dedicated To The Concerns
Of General Dentists In Alabama
Official Publication of the Alabama Academy of General Dentistry

*Rockefeller State Park Preserve
is a 1,771-acre public park
near Pleasantville, NY.
The land was once part of
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PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. Bankim Parikh, NY*



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Editor's Notes

Shivani Pandit, DDS, FAGD

STRESS LESS, SMILE MORE

Stress and mental fatigue challenge members of the dental profession. Recognizing this, the Board of Dental Examiners of Alabama under the leadership of Dr. Melodie Jones, prioritizes the overall wellbeing of its members with programing and strategies to help us as individuals and a profession manage our wellbeing. That focus was recognized on September 23rd, 2025, when the Board of Dental Examiners of Alabama was recognized as a 2025 Well-Being First Champion by ALL IN: Well-Being First for Healthcare.

“By removing stigmatizing language from our applications,” said Dr. Jones, “we affirm our support for Alabama’s dental workforce and ensure they can pursue mental health care without unnecessary barriers”. I applaud that courageous step to recognize and help our Alabama dentists and dental professionals and call on each member to do the same.

We all face the threat of professional burnout during our dental careers. To counteract its harmful effects, we must learn to recognize physical and mental symptoms of burnout at the initial stages and address it.

Here are a few strategies you can utilize to prevent and address burnout.

- Set boundaries for work time and be available to relax and reconnect.
- Apply stress management and practice mindfulness such as meditation, yoga, and breathing exercises for at least 5 to 10 minutes daily.
- Practice self-care. Track your sleep and follow sleep hygiene. Eat balanced meals to stay energized. Implement an exercise routine to boost your moods. Stay connected with friends and family. Disconnect with the screens.
- Celebrate small victories. Offer sincere compliments to your staff, patients, and family daily.
- Pay attention to negative thoughts and counter them with positivity. Studies show we have as many as 60 thoughts per minute. Take note when negative thoughts begin to outnumber the positive and purposely look for positive moments.
- Practice gratitude by acknowledging what you have achieved in your practice and life.
- Take frequent breaks during work if you can. Connect with nature. Do a puzzle, Stretch, and recharge.
- Cultivate hobbies and interests outside work. Find what brings you joy and schedule it into your day.
- Volunteer and give back to the community. We have resources in AGD that provide opportunities to guide and mentor others and elevate dental care within our state.
- Having a well-rounded life outside work will provide work life balance and prevent burning out. By taking care of our own mental and physical health, we can provide the best dentistry for our patients.

For more information, please visit www.dentalboard.org.

For volunteering opportunities, please visit www.agd.org

President's Message

Harrell Bullard, DMD, MAGD



It has truly been a honor to serve as the Alabama Academy of General Dentistry President for 2025. As I reflect on this year, I will certainly say our 2025 Emerald Coast Dental Conference was the highlight. This year's meeting was a great success and it was a joy to see friends and colleagues gather for continuing education and camaraderie. I appreciated the involvement of our many speakers, sponsors, and exhibitors as they came together to lift the meeting to new heights.

Your Alabama AGD has been involved in several advocacy efforts this year for our state's general dentists. We have engaged on fluoride, scope of practice with the botox issue, several national issues at the Washington DC Hill Day, and partnered with our Alabama Dental Association on insurance reform in our state, as well as other issues affecting our practices. Many of the afore mentioned issues will continue to be of primary concern into 2026 and beyond. I encourage each

ALAGD member to encourage a friend to join AGD and be active in advocating for their practices.

We have recently returned from our annual Regional Pre Caucus meeting where we discuss the issues that will be before the AGD House of Delegates in November. Alabama was well represented by myself, President Elect Kuntal Pandit, Vice President Forrest Bailey, and Executive Director Gary Myers. We had a very productive meeting and look forward to the HOD.

I will be passing the gavel to Dr. Melodie Jones, 2026 President, at year end. She has an excellent program lined up for the 2026 Emerald Coast Dental Conference. Your state constituent has much to be proud of and the organization is in very capable hands as we move forward into 2026 and beyond.





Bill Chesser, DMD, MAGD

THE MIRACLE OF FLUORIDE

Way back in 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first city in the world to add Fluoride to its drinking water. Dr. H. Trendly Dean, head of the Dental Hygiene Unit of the National Institute of Health (NIH), spearheaded this pioneering action.

Dr. Dean had enlisted the help of a senior scientist at NIH, Dr. Elias Elvove, who was able to measure normal Fluoride levels in water to 0.1 parts/million.

Dean had been working since the 1930's on this subject, and had determined that Fluoride levels of up to 1.0 PPM did not cause enamel fluorosis (the brown staining of teeth).

Startling to researchers was that these mottled teeth were resistant to decay! The question was: WHY?

During the 15-year Grand Rapids project, monitoring 30,000 school children, the rate of caries dropped by more than 60%! This resulted in an astounding discovery that yielded a major public health preventative which is still ongoing.

Looking back, Fluoride research actually was birthed in 1901. A young recent dental school graduate, Dr. Fredrick McKay, left the East Coast to set up practice in Colorado Springs, CO. He was astounded to realize scores of the locals here had brown-stained teeth—some as dark as chocolate candy. McKay searched in vain for a reason, but could find none. His local dental colleagues seemed not to be bothered by this phenomenon at all.

In 1909, Dr. McKay enlisted the help of renowned researcher Dr. G. V. Black, who was likewise bewildered that no studies had been done on brown-stained teeth. The next six years, until Black's death, yielded no further explanation, though they realized that young children whose secondary teeth had not erupted were at higher risk of staining. Mottled teeth, however, seemed more resistant to decay. Although Black had not agreed,

McKay suspected water supply may be the culprit.

In 1923, McKay was asked to visit Oakley, Idaho, where local parents were alarmed by fairly recent staining of their children's teeth. The discoloration had surfaced after a pipeline had been constructed to a warm spring five miles away, providing their water supply. He could find no obvious connection, but advised abandoning the pipeline.

Oakley authorities followed his advise, and children's teeth became stain-free in a few years. Now, McKay knew that the water supply was the source of the staining. But, WHY?

Brown tooth-staining began to show up in Bauxite, AK, and he was invited to come investigate. This town was the home of the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). His report reached the desk of the Chief Chemist of ALCOA, who was interested in proving the safety of Aluminum Cookware. Now, we're getting somewhere! Using photospectrographic (!! analysis, Bauxite, AK, water was revealed to have high levels of Fluoride!

"I don't believe this!" screamed the ALCOA Chief Chemist, when his assistant showed him the high levels of Fluoride in Bauxite, AK. When further tests provided the same results, he recanted.

Finally, Dr. McKay made the connection: providing samples of water from Oakley, ID, and Colorado Springs, CO, to ALCOA's Chemist revealed the reason for mottled teeth: each location had similar high levels of Fluoride!

After 30 years of researching, Fred McKay could prove that high levels of Fluoride caused Colorado Brown Stain! We owe this fellow a huge debt of gratitude for sticking with it until he uncovered the mystery.

Today, community water fluoridation is a public health preventative measure that has greatly reduced decay stats in those areas which provide it.



Dr. Chethan Chetty and Dr. Marc Worob with UAB dental students

ONE-ON-ONE WITH OUR AGD PRESIDENT DR. CHETHAN CHETTY AT ALAGD MEETING SEPTEMBER 2025

Dr. Shivani Pandit

How did you get started with Academy of general dentistry?

Dr. Chethan Chetty: Unfortunately, I was not involved with the AGD as a student. But I learned more from my dad who was involved with AGD Leadership, and he shared his passion with me.

Right after dental school, I joined my dad's practice. I quickly realized how much I still needed to learn, so I was constantly asking him questions. To help me get the training I needed, he suggested we attend AGD classes. That was incredibly fortunate because I was exposed to the AGD right when it mattered most. That exposure at once gave me a keen sense of community and allowed me to forge special, impactful connections that have been vital to my career. AGD was there to guide and support me from the very start of my professional life.

Dr. Pandit: What do you like the most about AGD?

Dr. Chetty: The AGD offers so much that I love, but the sense of community is what truly stands out. You can get continuing education (CE) anywhere, but those places rarely offer that feeling of belonging. At most CE events, you are on your own. When I come to AGD courses, however, it feels like I am coming home. Everyone shares the same values, and there is a real commitment to helping each other. This special family feeling is definitely present at the Alabama AGD. Beyond the community, the quality of education is exceptional. Pursuing my Fellowship and Mastership were two of the most career-changing decisions I ever made. They completely shifted the path of my practice, improved the kind of dentistry I do, and significantly increased my professional satisfaction!

Dr. Pandit: Why is it important to get involved with organized dentistry?

Dr. Chetty: It's crucial to be involved in organized dentistry. We need to understand that our profession does not exist in a bubble. It is our duty to stand up for dentistry and for one another. By protecting our profession, we ensure we can practice dentistry the way we know is best and the way our patients deserve. Secondly, you must commit to lifelong learning. Take classes with an open mind, realizing that yesterday's knowledge may not be today's best treatment. If we stop learning, we limit our ability to provide the highest possible standard of care to every patient.

Dr. Pandit: What is the future of AGD?

Dr. Chetty: The AGD's true power lies in being nimble, responsive, and quick to evolve for general dentistry. We are actively shaping the future through better representation. The AGD has been instrumental in encouraging leaders from all backgrounds and work settings, reflecting a much-needed shift in organized dentistry. Where other organizations have sometimes fallen short, the AGD is now leading the way in providing faster, more inclusive representation.

Moving forward, the AGD will be an organization that even better stands for its membership by empowering diverse leaders. This will allow us to understand member needs, respond effectively, and advocate in real time. This commitment to being highly responsive will focus on both global challenges and, critically, local needs. As a grassroots organization, we must empower our constituents and components to meet the unique demands of their members. We will act locally, but must think globally, while remaining the recognized leader in continuing education.

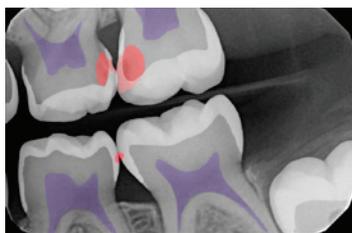
UNTIL AI TAKES OVER THE WORLD, AI HAS ITS PLACE IN DENTISTRY

Software is already one of the most powerful tools we've ever created, so when I first learned a few years ago that ChatGPT had become capable of writing computer code, I was a little taken aback at the implications. Having a background in software engineering, I realized this meant that AI now had what it needed generate better versions of itself. Initially, human interaction was required to guide it, but we now have AI models that possess the ability to train and improve themselves. Rather than the incremental advancements we've seen, things will begin moving forward exponentially. With the help of AI, we're either on the cusp (pun intended) of humanity's greatest breakthroughs in science and medicine, or just a few years away from total chaos.

While the powers that be debate the best way to regulate AI, I've chosen to appreciate some of the practical applications of AI in dentistry. One area I've had personal experience with involves its use in dental imaging.

Advantages

Probably the clearest advantage I've observed in using one of these AI tools (Overjet) has been how greatly it enhances patient education. Clever programming gives the software the ability to highlight key anatomic parts of the tooth as well as radiolucencies that it recognizes as decay. We've all had a patient say, "I understand what you're saying, but it's just a bunch of blobs of gray to me." Rather than pointing to "blobs of gray" on a screen—or, heaven help us, on a film—you can clearly demonstrate the location of suspected decay that the software highlights in red. In cases of extensive decay, you can easily demonstrate the proximity to the pulp chamber, which the software highlights in another color.



Software has highlighted suspected decay (shown in red) and its close proximity to the pulp chamber (shown in blue).

The other advantage for my diagnostic phase has been in detecting radiolucencies that I may not have taken note of otherwise. Let's be honest, dentists sometimes experience delusions of grandeur in that we imagine that we are somehow superhuman diagnosticians and that our eyes will catch every abnormality "better than any computer could." However, let's be honest once more. The reality is, we are human and on rare occasions we do fail to take note of some of the more subtle findings that are present in our images. This software makes it much less likely for this to happen.

Disadvantages

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of Overjet and other AI systems in general is the possibility for false positives and false negatives. Like other AI models that deal with images, these systems work by learning patterns and relationships from massive sets of images that are fed to the system paired with text descriptions of what is present in those images. From this, the system begins to "learn" what patterns of gray are typically deemed to be signs of decay. Because the software is essentially making an educated guess, it may fail to highlight areas of decay or, alternatively, highlight areas that are not decay at all. However, this doesn't happen often enough to outweigh the software's benefits,

and the accuracy of the software is sure to improve over time. This just goes to reinforce the idea that the diagnostician still has to combine what they see radiographically with what they detect intraorally and use their brain to come up with an accurate opinion on what is actually present.

The potential for false positives brings up another disadvantage of this software. Recently, I've taken note of marketing material that specifically markets these tools to DSOs. Why might you ask? Overjet has the ability to sync with your practice management software and track how many suspected problem areas were treatment planned to be addressed or not. It's easy to see how this helpful tool could become hijacked by overzealous business minds within a company and used to place an

overemphasis on treating on the basis of what the software says rather than what the dentist determines from his or her own clinical judgement. Given that the majority of the corporate dentistry workforce is comprised of younger, more inexperienced dentists, one concern is that this cohort could be more likely to have their treatment decisions influenced by these outside forces rather than honing their own clinical diagnostic skills over time.

Despite its occasional inaccuracies and potential for misuse, imaging software that uses AI techniques to visualize signs of decay, calculus, bone loss, etc. is a great leap forward in the ever-expanding digital toolset that is available on the market today. It will certainly remain a part of my clinical practice going forward. Rather than ruminate on whether AI will ever take the form of Skynet (a Terminator movie reference for those unaware), I prefer to look forward to all the exciting innovations that await dentistry in the coming years.

Disclosure statement: No financial benefit has been provided to the author of this article by any company in exchange for writing or publishing this article. Furthermore, the mention of this particular software company is not to be misconstrued as an endorsement of this software by the Alabama AGD.



Derrick Mendez, D.M.D.



DOES STARTING HERE... **...EVENTUALLY LAND US HERE?**

Can we take advantage of AI tools in dentistry without the negative consequences to the profession (and humanity in general)? Note: The individual characters shown here were created with generative AI provided by OpenAI.

EMERALD COAST AGD MEETING



Past presidents of ALAGD at the Emerald Coast meeting



Mastertrack class and presentations by students



Dr. Diana Tedder presenting her case



Dr. Gary Myers presented carved egg as a gift to Dr. Bill Chesser for his long time service as an editor for ALAGD



Dr. Toni Neumeier and Dr. Derrick Mendez



Dr. Jim Lassiter presenting his case



Evening reception at Emerald Coast meeting September 2025



Dr. Ross Isbell with his daughter



We are thankful to all our exhibitors for their support





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