

# TDA TODAY

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## UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry Serves as National Kickoff Site for ADA's Give Kids a Smile



Give Kids a Smile Kickoff Reception 2026. Photo by UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry.



UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry faculty, ADA trustees, and GHDS volunteers at the ADA GKAS Kickoff in February.

February is National Children's Dental Health Month, and UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry served as the national kickoff site for the 24th annual ADA's Give Kids a Smile (GKAS) program.

On February 6, about 300 faculty and external volunteer dentists from the Greater Houston Dental Society supervised fourth-year dental students, second-year dental hygiene students, and residents in pediatric dentistry, endodontics, and oral and maxillofacial surgery to provide more than \$111,000 in free dental care to 212 uninsured children from across the Greater Houston and Galveston areas.<sup>1</sup>

"Give Kids a Smile is a national public-private collaboration that ensures access to quality oral health care services for all children, and given that dental disease is the No. 1 reason children are absent from school, GKAS truly improves a child's overall well-being on a daily basis," said ADA Foundation Chair Dr Rita Cammarata of Houston.<sup>2</sup>

During the daylong outreach event, over 1,600 procedures were provided, spanning preventive, therapeutic, urgent,

and palliative care. With a strong focus on prevention, children received comprehensive dental exams, diagnostic imaging, oral hygiene instruction, cleanings, sealants, and fluoride varnish applications. In necessary cases, providers performed restorations, pulpotomies, endodontic procedures, and simple extractions.<sup>1</sup>

"For more than 2 decades, Give Kids A Smile has been a cornerstone of the School of Dentistry's outreach mission, reflecting our commitment to improving oral health and overall health through compassionate, community-centered care," said Raha K. Naderi, RDH, MEd, director of community outreach at UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry. "Serving as the national kickoff site this year spotlights the collective work of our students, residents, faculty, staff, and community partners to ensure children leave not only with healthier smiles, but with confidence, comfort, and a clear path to ongoing care."

### References

1. Rogers, K. (2026, February 6). UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry Kicks Off Give Kids a Smile. [dentistry.uth.edu](https://dentistry.uth.edu).
2. (2026, February 6). Give Kids a Smile Kicks Off in Houston. [adanews.ada.org](https://adanews.ada.org).



Give Kids a Smiles volunteers enjoy dinner hosted by ADA 15th District Trustee Dr Rita Cammarata.

## Fort Worth District Dental Society Celebrates National Children's Dental Health Month

In honor of National Children's Oral Health Month, volunteers from Fort Worth District Dental Society (FWDDS) and the FWDDS Alliance distributed stuffed animals to patients at Cook Children's Medical Center on February 10.

FWDDS members and their families stuffed the dragons and bears at the society's Santa's Workshop last December. Volunteers at Cook Children's included FWDDS President Dr James Fischer and his wife Annica, Dr Brooks Stevens, Dr Tonya Fuqua, Dr Terry Drennan and his wife Paula, and FWDDS Alliance members Paula Owens and Debbie Moore.



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# Texas Dental School News

## UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry

### New Department of Pediatric Dentistry Chair Named



Dr. Cristiane Fonteles

Dr. Cristiane Fonteles started serving as chair of the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry this month.

She joined the Department of Pediatric Dentistry faculty in 2024, earned her DDS degree and PhD in pharmacology from the Federal University of Ceará in Brazil, and holds certificates in general dentistry and pediatric dentistry from Eastman Dental Center and the University of Rochester in New York.

Her academic career has been defined by a strong commitment to evidence-based pediatric oral health care, translational research, and the education of future dental professionals. Prior to joining UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry, she held faculty appointments at the University of Fortaleza in Brazil, Indiana University School of Dentistry, and multiple academic and leadership roles at her alma mater, the Federal University of Ceará.

Dr. Fonteles succeeds Professor Nathanael Salako, BDS, MSc, who served as interim chair of the department since Sept. 1, 2024.

## Texas A&M University College of Dentistry

### Dean and Others Receive ACP Awards

Dr. Lily T. García, Texas A&M University College of Dentistry dean, and dental students Jessica Vu and David Qin each received awards at the 55th Annual Session of the American College of Prosthodontists in October 2025 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

García received the American College of Prosthodontists Education Foundation's 2025 Founders Society Award, presented in recognition of her significant impact on ACEF's growth and her commitment to advancing the prosthodontics specialty. The award honors those who have shown exceptional leadership, vision, and service to the foundation and the prosthodontics community.

Third-year dental students Jessica Vu and David Qin placed first and second, respectively, in the poster research competition Speaking Well at the Speak Easy at the same conference.

### Three Faculty Members Honored

In December 2025, Texas A&M University College of Dentistry in Dallas awarded Drs. Feng Tao, Rashmi Hegde, and Janna Burnett for strong leadership, professionalism, and a commitment to educating dental students, dental hygiene students, graduate students, and specialists.

"Our mission is to advance excellence in education, leadership and service, and Drs. Tao, Hegde, and Burnett embody all three," said Dr. Lily T. García, A&M Dentistry dean. "Their dedication to teaching and mentoring students strengthens our academic community and advances the future of dentistry."

Dr. Tao, professor and associate department head in biomedical sciences, is an internationally recognized specialist in pain management and neuroscience. He received A&M Dentistry's Premier Performance Award in Service for 2025 for his leadership and service at every level—departmental, college, university and beyond.

Dr. Hegde, clinical assistant professor in periodontics, received A&M Dentistry's Excellence in Clinical Teaching Award. She was recognized for her ability to bridge classroom learning to clinical practice, an approachable, interactive teaching style, and a commitment to student success. Hegde instills professionalism and confidence in students.

Dr. Burnett, clinical associate professor in comprehensive dentistry, received the Teaching Excellence Award for mentoring faculty and students and for serving as a positive role model and strong advocate for student wellness. Her efforts are instrumental in making A&M Dentistry's Mothers' Rooms and the Pocket Pantry successful.

### Faculty Member and Alum Named to Magazine's 40 Under 40 List

In Fall 2025, Dr. Mehrnaz Tahmasbi and Dr. Sabrina Dragan were named to *Incisal Edge* magazine's 2025 list of 40 Under 40 top dental specialists.

Dr. Tahmasbi is a clinical associate professor and radiology predoctoral program director at Texas A&M University College of Dentistry in Dallas, and Dr. Dragan is the owner of Dragan Smiles Complete Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics in Dallas. She completed a pediatric residency at A&M Dentistry in 2017.

The magazine recognizes excellence and honorees' insights and strategies to inspire and elevate the entire dental community, stated Edward Kobesky, head of content for parent company Benco Dental, in a press release announcing the winners.

Forty general dentists and 40 dental specialists are chosen each year and spotlighted in the magazine and online.

"I'm grateful for the recognition and for the opportunity to work alongside dedicated colleagues and students," Dr. Tahmasbi said. "Over the next year, I plan to focus on more collaborative research and the thoughtful use of artificial intelligence to support radiology education and patient care."

She volunteered as an adjunct assistant professor for a year before joining the full-time faculty in 2018.

"I was drawn to dentistry, and ultimately to radiology, because it brings together clinical judgment, diagnostic precision, and patient care in a way that allows me to make a meaningful impact," Tahmasbi said.

Dr. Moein Sadrkhani, clinical faculty in endodontics at A&M Dentistry, nominated her. He said Tahmasbi is a future leader and makes him optimistic about the direction of dental education.

Though she does not know who nominated her, Dr. Dragan's nomination praised her efforts to upgrade the practice's technology while staying true to its mission of delivering rewarding experiences for patients, parents and staff. She added services, such as lip- and tongue-tie releases for nursing mothers, laser restorative dentistry to provide compassionate care to children with needle phobias, and airway-focused orthodontics for children.

"The public has little awareness of how oral health and oral structure shape a child's overall health and development," Dragan said. "Mouth breathing and snoring are common, but they are not normal and may be linked to serious issues such as airway dysfunction and even behavioral concerns."



2026 ACEF Founders Award: Dr. Lily T. García, dean of Texas A&M College of Dentistry, is pictured with Dr. Joseph DiFazio, chair of the American College of Prosthodontists Education Foundation Board.



## 2026 TDA Meeting

Yeri Guak, DMD, FICD

Council on Annual Meeting and Continuing Education Programs Chair



Yeri Guak, DMD, FICD

Registration is now open for the 2026 TDA Meeting in San Antonio, and we have a great lineup of speakers that you and your team don't want to miss! This year, Dr. Chris Ramsey will be leading our keynote session on Friday morning, free for all attendees.

All team members can benefit from attending Katrina Klein's ergonomics lecture as well as crowd favorite Dr. Uche Odiatu's wellness and nutrition-based lectures. Front office team members can enroll in an all-day course and learn "Dental Insurance in a Day" with Teresa Duncan or attend the always popular Lois Banta's scheduling and management courses. Hygienists seeking to renew their local anesthetic infiltration certification can do so at the meeting this year and attend a lecture with the returning dynamic hygiene speaker, Amber Auger. Dentists won't want to miss out on the opportunity to catch engaging aesthetics lectures with Dr. Todd Snyder or a hands-on "All-on-X" workshop with Dr. Mohamed Attia. See the full program at [https://tdameeting.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2026-Preliminary-Program\\_Final.pdf](https://tdameeting.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2026-Preliminary-Program_Final.pdf).

Short on time but still want to get even an hour of CE in? Attend one of our Emerging Speaker lectures that cover a variety of dental related topics scheduled each day during the TDA Meeting. The Pre-Dental Admissions Panel is happening Saturday morning and will, again, feature representatives from area dental schools who will give valuable insight into the admissions process.

Don't forget that attendees can take courses for free if they volunteer as a speaker or room host for the conference! Learn more at <https://tdameeting.com/volunteer/>.

We have scoured the country to bring the best and brightest speakers to you this year, so check out our program book and don't miss out on registering before courses sell out!

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## Commonly Overlooked Compliance Requirements Can Be Avoided Through Proactive Awareness

The Department of Labor and other agencies are increasing enforcement efforts, in part due to expanded funding from recent federal legislation. Because dental practices face the same federal and state labor laws as Fortune 500 companies, the smallest dental practice is subject to a significant compliance burden and is often at most risk of non-compliance.

Three commonly overlooked compliance requirements at dental practices are: inaccurately classifying employees, overlooking meal and rest-break tracking, and keeping employee handbooks updated.

Dental practices frequently treat certain roles, like hygienists or assistants, as independent contractors when they don't meet the IRS criteria. This can lead to costly penalties and back taxes if challenged.

The law also requires clear policies and proper documentation regarding meal and rest break tracking.

Additionally, practice owners need to stay aware of labor laws as they change. Especially with paid leave, harassment policies, and wage transparency, handbook and policies must reflect current standards. Relying on an outdated version or one built from generic templates can work against them in the event of a complaint or audit.

A dependable third-party HR company can help practices navigate ongoing changes and stay proactive with compliance. TDA Perks Program partner HR&P works with dental practices across Texas to simplify HR, payroll, benefits administration, and compliance challenges. The Houston-based company offers comprehensive HR, payroll, and benefits administration services tailored to a practice.

HR&P offers scalable and flexible administrative models, comprehensive benefits administration, regulatory compliance expertise, and reliable payroll tax services, and has a designated support team for each discipline—including Affordable Care Act (ACA) support. TDA members receive preferred pricing. For more information, please visit [tdaperks.com](https://tdaperks.com) (Insurance & HR) or call HR&P at (281) 880-6525.

Website: <https://tdaperks.com/programs/hr-and-payroll/>



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## 2026 Required Course: Controlled Substances

Stay compliant with this virtual 4-hour course covering the opioid epidemic, ethical prescribing, PDMP use, pain management, and patient communication. This course meets all controlled substance CE requirements for dentists, including DEA permit holders (RULE §111.1(b)) and direct patient care (RULE §104.1(2)(B)).

Complete your required CE early and start 2026 on track!



**UPCOMING CONTROLLED-SUBSTANCES COURSE**

✓ Friday, June 5, 2026  
9:00 AM

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