

Stronger Together: The Case for MDA Membership

“Why should I be a member of the MDA?”

If you had asked me that question back in 1998 when I graduated from dental school, my answer would have been simple:

“Because it’s what we do.” Membership was automatic. You were a student member, and then you became a dues-paying member. No one asked, “What’s in it for me?” We just joined, and we were proud to say “I’m a member of the Michigan Dental Association.”

I remember there was a graduated dues scale for new dentists, which seemed fair, but honestly, I would have joined regardless. At that stage, I wasn’t thinking about value. Membership was simply part of being a dentist.

After graduation, I worked as an associate in two practices in which I had been a hygienist. Two years later, I bought into one of them. The practice had originally been owned by three dentists, all faithful MDA members. They paid their dues every year, read the *Journal*, and attended some meetings, but they didn’t really use many of the membership benefits. Following their lead, I did the same.

For years, I paid my dues, skimmed the *Journal*, and attended a few component meetings. But I wasn’t invested, and I wasn’t taking advantage of the many resources available.

That changed when I was invited to join the MDA Continuing Education Committee. Suddenly, I had a reason to dig deeper, to learn what the MDA was really about. I still remember a conversation with a colleague who posed the hypothetical question: “What would happen if the ADA and MDA ceased to exist?”

His answer stuck with me: “We would lose our voice — locally, statewide, and nationally. We would lose support for new dentists, mid-career dentists, and those preparing for retirement. We would have nowhere to go for answers. Before long, we’d find ourselves saying, ‘We need to organize, we need a voice.’ Out of necessity, we would reinvent organized dentistry all over again.”



By Cheri Newman, DDS
MDA President

That's exactly why the MDA matters. We need to continue to guard against failure — failure of our association and failure of organized dentistry. Membership isn't optional. It's essential to our profession.

One great example of the value of MDA membership and organized dentistry happened during the pandemic. When COVID-19 shut us down, the MDA became our trusted source for guidance: What was mandated by the governor, what patients expected, and how to reopen safely. I attended every webinar. I relied on every update.

And here's the important part: That information was shared with all dentists, members and nonmembers alike. Was that the right thing to do? Absolutely. In a national emergency, we help one another.

But once the crisis ended, I couldn't help but feel disappointed to hear colleagues say, "I didn't pay a dime, but I got all the same information members did." That's not professionalism — that's taking advantage. Thankfully, membership grew after COVID-19, as many dentists saw firsthand the value of belonging.

Fast-forward to today: Automatic membership is no longer assumed. New dentists rightly ask, "What's the value?" The answer is longer than many realize. Beyond the intangible benefits of advocacy and community, there are very real, practical advantages, such as:

- Savings on malpractice, liability, health, disability, and life insurance.
- Discounted continuing education.
- Information from a source you can trust.
- Legal and HR assistance.
- Practice support services.
- Discounts on supplies, credit card processing, and waste disposal.
- Classified ads, a job board, and career support.
- Even help with mental health and wellness.

Taking advantage of just a few of these benefits can more than cover the cost of dues.

But membership is about more than discounts or perks. It's about having a professional home. It's about knowing someone has your back, whether you're a new grad navigating your first job, a mid-career dentist running a busy practice, or a seasoned professional planning retirement.

The MDA is our collective voice. It strengthens our profession, and it only works if we all participate. ●

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Four members who say practice life is better with MDA membership — and here's why.

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Believe it — you can save more than your dues by taking advantage of the MDA's great array of endorsed programs and services.