

Why I value EFDA assistants, the program

Perspectives shared from a dentist and an expanded functions assistant

This is the third edition in a series of EFDA and dental assisting related articles for the Focus.

In April, MDA staff attended a meeting of the Greater St. Louis Dental Assistants Association at Missouri College in St. Louis. We were asked to be guests of the meeting and to present an overview of the Expanded Function Dental Assistant (EFDA) program.

In addition to MDA staff, Dr. Mark Züst, MDA member and general practitioner in St. Peters, and one of his expanded functions assistants, Ashley Meinershager, presented at the program. Dr. Züst has been involved with the EFDA program since its inception in Missouri and serves as a trainer for MDA courses.

They shared with attendees how they value the EFDA program and how it not only benefits their practice overall, but especially how it benefits their personnel, both in a feeling of pride and a higher level of professionalism.

For this issue's EFDA column, we've asked Dr. Züst and Ashley to answer questions about EFDA, in an effort to share their ideas and experiences—and to share why they both think becoming EFDA trained is one of the best things assistants can do, and one of the best practice management ideas a dentist can use.

DR. ZÜST: *How did you first become involved with EFDA and how long have you had EFDAs in your practice?*

I saw the benefits of the program right away, and I got involved soon after the EFDA program was launched. I have had EFDAs working with me in our practice ever since. I also have been involved in the expansion of the EFDA rule that is now being considered by the Dental Board.

ASHLEY: *Tell us about your career path. Did you have a formal dental assistant education or did you have on the job training? Where did you get your EFDA training?*

I went to Midwest Institute in Earth City. When I completed my course the only certificate I received was for completion. Therefore, in order to become EFDA, I had to take the Missouri Basic Skills Exam. After taking the exam, I went

on to take MDA classes. I traveled around Missouri to complete each program.

What made you want to become an EFDA?

I wanted to be an EFDA dental assistant because it allows you to be able to do more in your office. The patients respect you more, and you have more knowledge in dental anatomy and morphology.

DR. ZÜST: *Tell us how you utilize EFDAs in your practice; what you are able to do differently than doctors who do not have EFDAs?*

I have my assistants do most of the procedures that they are trained for. Currently we use two treatment rooms and two hygiene rooms, all at the same time. Before EFDAs, we would have a patient in each treatment room, I would administer anesthesia, and one would basically just need to wait while we treated the other. Now we are able to use a team approach; for example, I might finish several filling preparations in one room and then I can switch to the next room while an EFDA completes the procedure. In fact, when I do hygiene checks I can often spend more time with my recall patients, because our EFDA trained assistants are busy treating their patients.

ASHLEY: *What do you feel is different for you from when you were a regular dental assistant to now being an EFDA? How has it impacted your work experience? Has it impacted how you interact with patients?*

When you are a regular dental assistant, you rely on your dentist to do everything. In being an EFDA, you are able to do so much more on your own, even without your dentist in the



Dr. Mark Züst with, from left, his expanded functions assistants Ana Caponey, and Ashley Meinershagen, as well as Danielle Riordan, Dr. Züst's daughter and fourth-year UMKC dental student. Before pursuing dental school, Danielle worked as an EFDA in Dr. Züst's practice.

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same room. It also allows your dentist to do more work on other patients, while you are attending to yours. This makes things much easier for you, your dentist, and the patients. Because you have more knowledge in the courses, it's easier for you to explain things and answer more questions, and, when you are able to answer more questions, patients respect you so much more.

DR. ZÜST: *How do you encourage assistants in your practice to become EFDAs?*

I would say that I require my assistants to become EFDAs. I have not really thought about it before you asked the question, but I could not imagine having an assistant who was not either EFDA trained or planning on being EFDA trained.

Do you pay for their training? If so, what do you feel the return on investment is?

I do, I believe that it is well worth the cost.

Return on investment can be measured in several ways, from a purely economic standpoint, I am sure that our office is significantly more productive.

Do you find they are happier in their work? Contribute more to the practice and professionalism? Do you find that they stay employed with you longer?

We are blessed to have a very low turnover rate with our employees. I think that the most important factor here is that the office staff is treated as a team. Everybody counts. The more capable each employee is, the better they fit into the team. I think that is the key. EFDA training has given our assistants tremendous confidence; they are happier, feel more fulfilled, and more a part of the great profession that we have chosen. I believe that this is the most important point, they are no longer "workers"; they are an integral part of a professional team.

Do you recognize the EFDAs in your practice in any special way?

I brag on the abilities of our EFDAs all the time. Our patients love it. We will have all of their certificates framed and displayed in the treatment rooms. Also, on their scrubs they have embroidered that they are an "EFDA," which is a great conversation starter with patients, and a chance for the assistant to talk about their training, which creates more value in the practice.

ASHLEY: *We've heard some assistants express fear about taking an EFDA course. What would you say to them to allay these fears? What did you do to ready yourself for both passing the course, and successfully demonstrating your skills once you returned to the practice setting?*

Most people have fear because they don't know what to expect. But when you sign up for your EFDA classes, you will receive a packet of information and if you read all your information and understand it, the courses will be easy. Make sure you go over all the study guides and when you go to the courses, the teachers will help you understand any questions you might have. The hands-on experience really brings the courses and information together. For every 3-to-5 students, there is one teacher, who is right there in case you have any questions and to make sure you are doing the procedure correctly. This helps you when you return to your office and you are ready to do the work by yourself. You and your dentist will be the ones to determine if you are ready.

DR. ZUST: *As an EFDA course trainer and doctor who employees EFDAs, what would you tell other doctors who have either just sent their assistants to an EFDA course or are considering doing so?*

If you are an assistant considering it, go ahead and do it; if you are a doctor who has just sent an assistant, I am confident that you will be pleased.

Obviously, it's only a weekend course. What should doctors know or do to help ensure maximum success of the newly trained EFDAs skills?

First of all doctors need to know that EFDA training gives the assistants the "basics" of the procedures that they will be performing. Do not think that your assistant will come back ready for full speed the first day. Doctors must realize that the main part of the EFDA training will be in their offices after the course. Take your time; explain to your assistants why they do each step that they are doing. For the first several patients for each procedure, I actually acted as an assistant to our "new" EFDA.

ASHLEY: *What would you tell assistants who are thinking about becoming EFDA trained?*

Don't think twice because you need to better yourself in any way you can. You should always try to improve your skills.

DR. ZUST: *What would you tell other doctors who don't have EFDAs?*

I would ask the question, "what are you waiting for?"

For questions about the EFDA program, contact Mandy Lewis at the MDA or visit www.moefda.org. Currently, this page links to the MDA page about EFDA, but soon will link to a stand-alone site specifically for all Missouri EFDA program information, including grant details and future course updates.

Like to teach?

Consider being an EFDA Trainer



Would you like to host an EFDA Clinical Lab in your office? MDA is seeking members in all areas of the state to become a HOST VENUE for the forthcoming updated EFDA program set to launch this fall.

WHAT'S REQUIRED OF HOST VENUE?

- Attend a Train the Trainer session
- Act as lead trainer for clinical course
- Have operatories to accommodate 6 to 12 assistants
- Recruit other doctors to help train at your course
- Work with the MDA to schedule a one day course at your office
- Provide minimal materials for the course (cost reimbursed by MDA)

WHAT ARE THE HOST BENEFITS?

- Earn CE credits
- Receive monetary stipend
- Help and encourage dental assistants to further their education

I'M INTERESTED, HOW DO I SIGN UP?

- Go to www.modental.org/efda to complete a 'Host Venue Application'
- Contact Mandy Lewis at 573-634-3436 or mandy@modental.org.
- Even if you have hosted a course before or expressed interest in hosting a course in the future, please complete an application to reiterate your interest in continuing with the program.

MDA staff help you through each step to ensure course success