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Choosing A Dentist: Beyond Word-of-Mouth

Systematic Strategies, Dental Benefit Programs Expand Selection Options

When people start the process of choosing a dentist, they traditionally ask friends, neighbors and coworkers for recommendations. But today there are strategies and information sources that help ensure the process, and the dentist selected are more likely to meet the overall oral health needs of consumers.

“While a recommendation from a friend or neighbor can be quite valuable in choosing a dentist, it shouldn’t be the only source of information. With a little more effort, people can ensure the oral health care provider they choose is the best choice for their oral health, lifestyle and finances,” said Ed Schooley, DDS, vice president and dental director of Delta Dental of Iowa. “People should not let lack of a familiar dentist keep them from getting regular care. There are many ways to match needs and circumstances with good, qualified dentists in your community,” Dr. Schooley said.

The first step in choosing a dentist involves assessing your situation.

- Are you looking for a dentist who can treat you as well as every member of your family? This will probably lead you to look for a dentist with a general or family practice.
- Do you or your loved one have any special needs, such as a disability or strong fear of the dentist? You will want to note whether the dentists you are considering have the facilities, expertise and interest in treating patients with your special needs.
- How important is convenience and lifestyle in your decision? For many people, it’s important that dental appointments can be scheduled around work and personal

schedules. Explanation of available treatment and payment options and a dentist's participation in a dental benefits network are also key considerations.

People with dental benefits through their employers have a head start in finding a dentist, especially if they're covered by a dental carrier with a network of dentists. Dental carriers provide directories, available in booklets or online, arranged by location and fields of dental specialties to provide consumers with easy access to information.

For more information, you can also check with local and state dental societies, often listed in telephone directories under "Dentists" or "Associations," to learn more about a specific dentist.

Many university dental schools or dental hygiene schools have outreach programs for people who have difficulty gaining access to dental care, such as the uninsured or underinsured. Information on dental health care programs and providers can be obtained at www.healthfinder.gov, a service of the National Health Information Center, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. In Iowa, the Donated Dental Services program, supported by Delta Dental of Iowa, also helps to match persons with disabilities with volunteer dentists. Contact the Iowa Donated Dental Services program at 800-985-0034.

Delta Dental of Iowa is the largest and most experienced provider of dental benefits in the state. The Iowa company is a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, a national organization of not-for-profit Delta Dental member companies. The national association is the largest dental benefits carrier in the nation, providing coverage to more than 45 million people in nearly 76,000 employer groups.

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