



# ADVOCACY PULSE – FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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## OVERVIEW

Over the course of the past decade or more we have seen a significant shift in the way we communicate - with each other, businesses, places of worship...effectively our entire world. Never has it been easier and more convenient to convey information from point A to point B in consumable portions, in real time, across the globe. With smartphones in virtually everyone's pocket, the only reason for someone to be out of touch is very intentional restraint in the form of "unplugging." Sports scores, historical facts and data, research, phone numbers, pictures of your 3rd grade teacher's daughter's wedding, and on and on the list could go. It can all be acquired in an instant. While this media revolution has improved our society in so many ways, it has not come without a cost. And dentistry has not been immune from this cost.

The darker side of this explosion of information is a rampant decrease in the social interactions that make us human, as well as the difficulty in distinguishing factual information from false information and all the variations in between. True interpersonal interactions have been largely replaced by social media platforms and texting. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and probably another 10 platforms I do not know about have become the source of information for millions of people. In addition to false information's easy accessibility, the impersonal nature of social media also has allowed a sounding board for anyone with an opinion and a keyboard. Some of those people are concerned about facts. Some are concerned about drama and stirring the pot. No matter what the agenda, the dark side of social media creates a Gordian knot which only serves to misinform, frustrate, and harbor an environment where people can complain and argue with no real resolution. So how do we step out of this cycle and make a real difference in dentistry? Well, I'm glad you asked!!

Social media platforms like Facebook certainly have their place in the new way we communicate and can be a great tool for those of us concerned with the profession of dentistry. It is a great way to disseminate information regarding issues facing dentistry and what organizations and individuals are doing to support advocacy and efforts to improve the profession. It can create a grassroots response of stimulated discussion and an emotional desire to act, and it can help you coordinate that grassroots effort into action when the need arises. The problem is that in our fast-paced work environment, we can lose the emotional desire to act as soon as we scroll down our Facebook feed. When you aren't given a direct action to make a change, you forget about it and move on until the issue is raised again. This cycle only creates frustration and certainly doesn't harvest change. So what ACTIONS can you take to make a difference and be an advocate for our profession?

## HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

- **Stay Informed:** Read the publications of the organizations you are involved with, especially Texas AGD's GP Advocacy Pulse and the monthly online Gatekeeper. I know it's difficult when you get a dozen emails daily from dental organizations, but the challenges our profession is facing are often found in these newsletters and bulletins. Be wary of anything you read on social media and/or hearsay from other dentists. Scrutinize this information. When action is called for, such as contacting a legislator or other key contact, make sure you act. Every voice is important in the process.

## WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, CONT.

- **Give Financially:** I call it my “Getting to practice dentistry in Texas tax.” We are very fortunate that we have a strong Texas AGD Advocacy program. This comes at the expense of many individuals’ hard work and time. Set an amount on auto-draft to the Texas AGD advocacy fund so that our members, Advocacy Council, advocacy consultant, Texas AGD staff, and all those involved with representing the General Dentist in Texas can continue to work on your behalf. We have representatives at TSBDE meetings, stakeholder meetings, meetings with legislators, testifying in the House and Senate, among a myriad of other advocacy activities. If you do nothing else, please support these volunteers with backing them financially. It’s easy. Set it and forget it. Do it now. I’ll wait...

[www.TAGD.org/Advocacy](http://www.TAGD.org/Advocacy)

- **Get Involved:** The first two are the quickest and easiest ways to make a difference in an effective manner, but there are those who want to have a direct hand in the process. Of course, this also means the commitment level goes up a notch. You must get involved in the process. Some ways you can do this are to first get to know your local Texas AGD component. Who’s on the board? What committees are available? How can you help them? If advocacy is your passion, perhaps you can organize a town hall meeting or meet-and-greet with a local legislator. You can go and visit with your local legislators about issues and bills facing dentistry. You can show interest in an appointment on the Texas AGD Advocacy Council. They are here to help support you with information, insight, and many other resources on your journey to become a larger part of the voice of the general dentist.

It’s very easy to get stuck in the rut of spending hours on Facebook debating the problems of our profession. It can sometimes be almost therapeutic. But, more often than not, it is a frustrating cycle that ends with the proclamation “Why isn’t (fill in the blank) doing anything about this?” Well, it’s time to fill in the blank with your name.

### Advocacy Council Members

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### ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

To stay current on legislative updates check the Gatekeeper section in the monthly *TexasGP* or visit [www.TAGD.org/gatekeeper](http://www.TAGD.org/gatekeeper).

