



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Delta Dental Plans Association
1515 West 22nd Street
Suite 450
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523
Telephone 630-574-6001
Facsimile 630-574-6999

Contacts:
Kate Gerlesits, Delta Dental Plans Association
630-574-6994
kgerlesits@deltadental.com
or
Angela Feig, The Meyocks Group
515-327-3425
angelafeig@meyocks.com

Dentists Often First to Spot Eating Disorders in Patients

Oak Brook, Ill. (January 26, 2008) -- National Eating Disorders Awareness Week runs Feb. 22 – 28 and is sponsored by the National Eating Disorders Association to raise awareness of the dangers surrounding eating disorders and the need for early intervention and treatment. Because Delta Dental Plans Association recognizes eating disorders as a serious healthcare concern, it also wants to increase awareness of the potential oral health problems that can be caused by eating disorders.

An eating disorder is a complex compulsion to eat in a way which disturbs physical, mental, and psychological health. The three most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. The eating may be excessive (compulsive over-eating); restrictive; or may include normal eating punctuated with episodes of purging¹ (such as self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting, diuretics or diet pills²). The eating may include cycles of bingeing and purging; or may encompass the ingesting of non-foods¹ (such as dirt, clay or chalk).³ Each of these disorders robs the body of adequate minerals, vitamins, proteins and other nutrients needed for good health and may cause injury to teeth, muscles and major organs.²

“Eating disorders have serious implications for oral health and overall health,” says Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Stomach acids can damage teeth with repeated exposures during purging for those individuals with bulimia nervosa. For those individuals with anorexia nervosa, which is characterized by self-induced starvation, poor nutrition can affect oral health by increasing the risk for periodontal [gum] diseases.”¹

As many as 35 million men, women and children suffer from eating disorders in the United States. Dentists are becoming the first line of defense when it comes to spotting eating disorders in patients, according to the Academy of General Dentistry. For example, although parents may not recognize that their child is anorexic or bulimic, they are often still taking the child to a dentist on a regular schedule and the dentist may spot the oral signs of the disease.⁴

Bad breath, sensitive teeth and eroded tooth enamel are just a few of the signs that dentists use to

determine whether a patient suffers from an eating disorder. Other signs include teeth that are worn and appear almost translucent, mouth sores, dry mouth, cracked lips, bleeding gums, and tender mouth, throat and salivary glands.⁴

According to the National Eating Disorders Association, studies have found up to 89 percent of bulimic patients have signs of tooth erosion, due to the effects of stomach acid.⁵ Over time, this loss of tooth enamel can be considerable, and the teeth change color, shape and length.

“Delta Dental Plans Association supports providing appropriate referral for those individuals with signs and symptoms of eating disorders and encourages those with eating disorders, or those who are caring for individuals with eating disorders to seek care from a dental professional to manage the dental consequences of these disorders,”¹ Anderson says.

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association (www.deltadental.com) based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 51 million Americans in more than 93,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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¹Delta Dental Plans Association National Scientific Advisory Committee Library

²American Dental Association, “Oral Health Topics: Eating Disorders” http://www.ada.org/public/topics/eating_disorders.asp

³National Eating Disorder Information Center, <http://www.nedic.ca/knowthefacts/definitions.shtml>

⁴Academy of General Dentistry, “How Your Dentist Can Detect an Eating Disorder,”

<http://www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=h&iid=346&aid=1236>, *Oral Health Resources*, March 30, 2007; AGD Impact magazine, May 2005

⁵National Eating Disorders Association