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Does New Hampshire face a pending dentist shortage?

DENTAL
loss

■ **N.H. WORKFORCE**

BY CINDY KIBBE

In just three years, states like Vermont, Maine and Arizona will have more dentists retiring than graduating from schools to replace them. New Hampshire also has issues over access to primary dental care

in parts of the state, but whether a shortage is on the horizon is unclear.

But with the increasing emphasis placed on oral health as an integral part of overall health, the issue has become all the more critical to address.

"Across the country, the number of dentists per 1,000 population is the lowest it's been in 100 years," said Tom Raffio, chief

executive of Northeast Delta Dental, a dental insurance company in Concord. "In 2013, more dentists will be retiring than graduating. This will peak in 2023, with a net loss of 1,706 dentists nationwide, and it doesn't correct until 2030."

According to an Aug. 2 article in ADA Now, a publication of the American

DENTIST SHORTAGE, PAGE 18

TD Bank sues BrandPartners over loan deal

■ **N.H. COURTS**

Bank alleges BrandPartners broke the terms of a \$5 million revolving loan

BY BOB SANDERS

TD Bank N.A. has filed suit against the defunct BrandPartners Group Inc. and its top executives to recover almost \$3 million allegedly due under the terms of a loan agreement.

The suit, filed Sept. 23 in Strafford County Superior Court, alleges the now-defunct Rochester company owes it about \$2.9 million. It also names former chief executive James F. Brooks, Jane Quilliam, the company's former chief accounting officer, and William Foley, a former executive vice president. It names two guarantors of the loan, BrandPartners subsidiaries Grafico Inc. and Building Partners Inc., as well.

The company, which designed bank interiors,

TD BANK SUIT, PAGE 20

Gunmaker fires back over Ruger lawsuit

■ **COURTS**

U.S. Ordnance files countersuit over Ruger's alleged malfunctioning parts

BY BOB SANDERS

A countersuit filed against Sturm, Ruger & Co., Inc. alleges that the company's Newport facility supplied machine gun parts that put the lives of U.S. troops in Afghanistan at risk and had to be recalled.

The countersuit was filed by U.S. Ordnance after Southport, Conn.-based Ruger filed a lawsuit against the Nevada firm in an attempt to settle a "very basic commercial dispute" over unpaid goods, in

the words of Kevin Reid, vice president and general counsel of Ruger.

But U.S. Ordnance attorney Michael A. Danforth said the dispute is really over parts that "just didn't work as they are supposed to," and that the whole matter has tainted its reputation with the U.S. military, its main customer.

The product that Ruger supplied is so problematic, "that we would have to turn it

into scrap metal," he said.

The whole controversy was buried in U.S. District Court in Concord for months, until it was unearthed last month by TheLobbyNH.com.

Ruger mainly manufactures small arms for personal use, but its Pine Ridge Castings facility in Newport also makes parts for other gun manufacturers, including U.S.

RUGER LAWSUIT, PAGE 21

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**NHBR INTERVIEW:
DIANNE MERCIER**

A conversation with the president of the New Hampshire division of People's United Bank **PAGE 3**

**14 HONORED AT BUSINESS
EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

Feldstein, Ray inducted in NHBR Hall of Fame **PAGE 14**



**BEWARE THE DEPARTING
EMPLOYEE**

Protecting the company should start long before the employee decides to leave **PAGE 32**



Dentist shortage

FROM PAGE 1

Dental Association, New Hampshire and some 20 other states across the country are already experiencing some type of dentist

workforce issue.

Two questions emerge: How many practicing dentists are there in New Hampshire? How old are the dental practitioners?

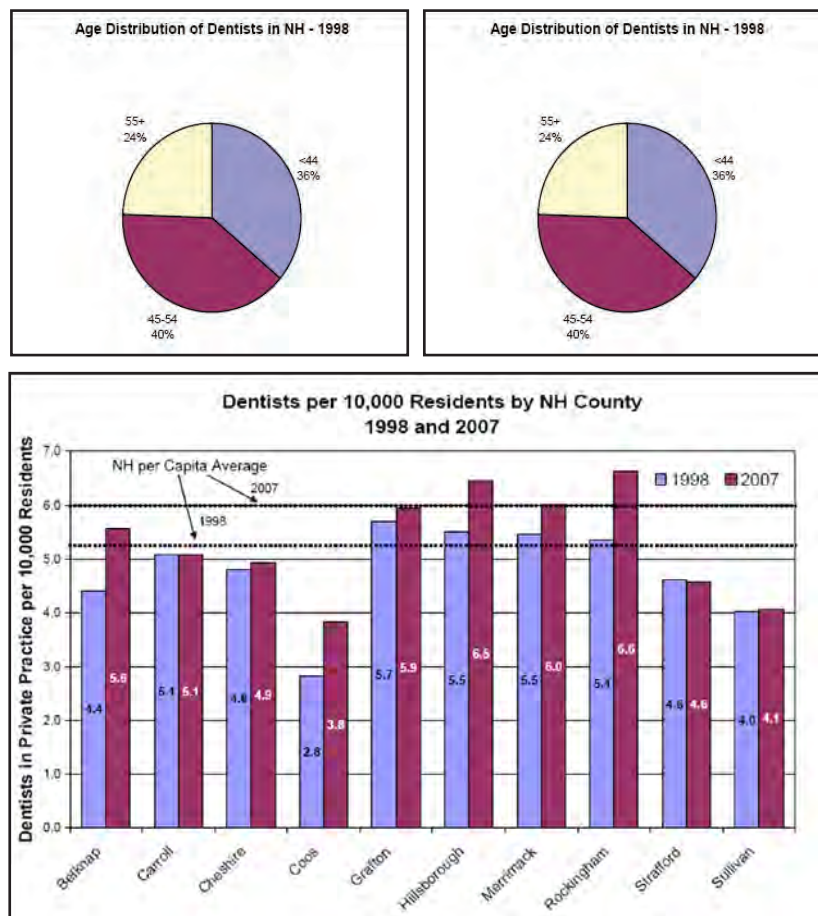
According to the New Hampshire Board of Dental Examiners, the state's dental licensing body, there were 1,014 "licensed and active

general practitioners" in the state as of Sept. 17.

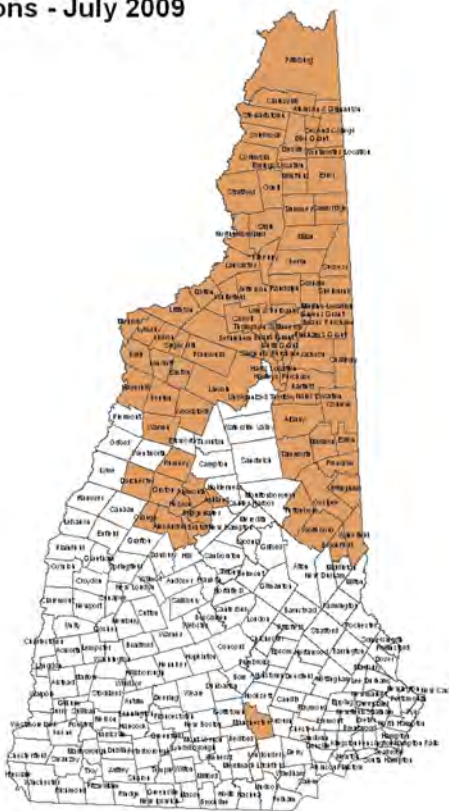
But Lisa Bujno, head of the state Bureau of Population, Health and Community Services, said it's difficult to get an accurate picture of New Hampshire's dentist workforce because, unlike other states, the Granite State doesn't

have an ongoing data collection system that definitively tells who's working and where at any given time.

"We need to have a better system of collecting data to aid us in figuring out shortage areas," she said. "Right now, we have to survey the area periodically."



New Hampshire's Dental Health Professional Shortage Area Designations - July 2009



Charts courtesy of N.H. Center for Public Policy Studies

Striking differences

Virtually all surveys only provide a snapshot of a sample population.

"Dental Services and Workforce in New Hampshire," a January report by the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies, based its data on a state Board of Dental Examiners' figure of 757 "licensed and active" dentists as of September 2009, and reported some 5.8 dentists per 10,000 residents statewide.

The national average is 5.5 dentists per 10,000 population.

But one of the biggest concerns is that the dental profession in New Hampshire – like the rest of the state's population – is aging.

According to the policy center's January >

Are dental practice 'extenders' the answer?

The Kellogg Foundation has been researching the creation of mid-level dental practitioners who would function in the dental industry in the same way a physician's assistant or a nurse practitioner does in the medical industry.

One position, called a dental health aid therapist, or DHAT, has gotten some attention as solving an extreme dental care access issue in remote parts of Alaska, where Native American populations are served.

The Kellogg Foundation also has awarded grants in Vermont, among other states, for studying the dental therapist model as a solution to its maldistribution issues.

Washington and Minnesota as well as Canada and New Zealand and some 50 other countries already have such programs. Other states, such as Maine and New Mexico, are looking at some other type of dental practice "extender."

The scope of practice of such professionals, however, has been controversial in the dental industry, often centering on the procedures dental therapists can and cannot do.

For instance, in Alaska, dental therapists can provide simple fillings and uncomplicated tooth extractions under the supervision of a dentist (often via the phone or Internet) – which the ADA believes is tantamount to practicing dentistry without a license.

In fact, the ADA sued the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the state of Alaska in 2006 to stop the dental health aide therapist program, but settled the following year. – **CINDY KIBBE**

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FROM PAGE 18

dental workforce study, from 1998 through 2007 (the most recent data available), the number of New Hampshire dentists aged 55 and older increased from 24 percent to 41 percent. Dentist aged 44 and younger dropped from 36 percent in 1998 to 29 percent in 2007.

Indeed, a recent survey conducted by the state Department of Health and Human Services and the Bi-State Primary Care Association found that 51 percent of the 500 dentists responding said they were over 55.

The "2010 Survey of Actively Licensed Dentists," also said that some 40 percent responded that they intend to leave their practice within 10 years.

"The profession is definitely aging, like the rest of New Hampshire, and it's going to get worse," said Raffio. "With the economy, some older ones might be working longer. Younger dentists are more aware of work-life issues and might just work a few days a week or for corporate dental clinics instead of having a solo practice."

There are some striking differences in dental workforce numbers when viewed at the county level.

According to the policy center study, Hillsborough County has the greatest concentration of dentists, at 6.3 per 10,000, as does Grafton County, and is closely followed by Rockingham at 6.2 and Merrimack at 5.9.

Sullivan County, however, has half that, at just 3.3 dentists per 10,000 residents.

Interestingly, Coos County also has 6.3 dentists per 10,000, which may actually suggest an oversaturation in a market that is typically under-served by medical care.

According to Raffio, Vermont is also experiencing the same "maldistribution," and "Maine has both issues - 4.7 dentists per 100,000 population overall and maldistribution."

Dental schools

Does the Granite State's maldistribution of dentists and an aging workforce necessarily spell a shortage?

James Williamson, executive director of the New Hampshire Dental Society, the state's professional association, doesn't think so.

"We do have some problems with maldistribution, and that will continue. But it's not a shortage, though," he said. "North of Concord, trying to fill some positions will be difficult. But overall, a shortage won't be the case for New Hampshire."

Dr. Gary Lindner, a dentist and orthodontist in Bedford, agreed, and said he sees a bit of a workforce surplus.

"I don't see an abrupt change even over 10 years. I don't see a shortage. Today's graduates are actually having rough times getting a position because of the economy," he said.

Lindner, a member of both the New Hampshire and the Massachusetts Dental Societies and the American Association of Orthodontists, said today's dentists have tightened their belts in weathering the economy, like most businesspeople. In doing so, they have not taken on associates or expanded their solo practices - traditional routes for new graduates to enter into practice.

Lindner said, if anything, the state and country are under-served in primary care, but over-

served in specialists.

To illustrate his point, he said when he began his practice some 25 years ago, his was the only orthodontic clinic in the area.

"Now there are three or four within walking distance," he said.

One issue that many believe may have an impact on the future of the New Hampshire dentist workforce is the lack of a dental school in the Granite State.

There are several degree programs and technical schools for dental hygienists and dental assistants, but none conferring a doctor of dental surgery (DDS) or doctor of dental medicine (DMD) degree.

The closest programs are currently located at Boston University, Tufts University and Harvard University in Massachusetts, with several more in New York.

The dental society's Williamson said the expected 2012 opening of a dental program at the University of New England in Portland, Maine, may help add dentists in New Hampshire.

But, Bujno said, "We don't know how we can attract new dentists without a dental school in the state."

Raffio agreed, saying, "The fact that we don't have a school of dentistry does hamper New Hampshire somewhat in being able to predict or plan for fluctuations in the dental profession within the state. If we had a dental school in northern New England, the graduates would probably stay."

Lindner doesn't see a school as a panacea for the state's care access problems, though.

"People stay close to where they received their training, and go where they want to live,

but not necessarily where need is," he said.

In an effort to ease some of the maldistribution, Raffio said that the dental school at the University of New England will offer externships in New Hampshire.

He said Northeast Delta Dental also has had conversations with the dental college at Tufts about loan forgiveness if the graduate decides to practice in New Hampshire.

For now, access to dental care in the more rural parts of the state is and probably will remain something of a concern, but an overall shortage is not something most of those in the profession see as imminent.

Added the dental society's Williamson: "We will have some difficulties, but New Hampshire is a good place to practice dentistry." **NHBR**

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