



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **R.T. FREEMAN DENTAL SOCIETY LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO ANSWER A CALL TO ACTION**

**Washington, DC-** The Robert T. Freeman Dental Society (RTFDS), the oldest chapter of the National Dental Association (NDA), has launched a massive scholarship campaign effort for dental students at Howard University College of Dentistry. Proceeds from the annual NDA Inauguration and Scholarship Gala will fund the scholarships. This year's Gala sponsored by Smile Direct, United Concordia Dental & Hiossen Implants, will be held on Saturday, December 11, 2021 at the National Museum of African American History and Culture from 7pm -11pm It will include the inauguration of Dr. Cheryl Lee, Past President and member of the RTFDS and Howard University College of Dentistry graduate; and installation of the new officers of the National Dental Association. Ticket purchases and donations can be accessed at [www.rtfds.org](http://www.rtfds.org). Howard University trains health professionals dedicated to serving the most vulnerable populations. Scholarship support for Howard dental students will reduce their student debt burden and increase their ability to serve in communities where they are needed most. Major sponsors of the event are Smile Direct Club, Colgate, AARP, Schein, DentaQuest, Howard University College of Dentistry, ADI Mobile Health and the American Dental Education Association.

The recent COVID pandemic has illuminated racial health disparities and emphasized the impact of oral health on patients with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory diseases. Poor dental health has also been linked to the severity and duration of COVID. Evidence-based research connects oral health to systemic health in ways that can no longer justify separation of the health disciplines.<sup>1,2</sup> At the height of the COVID pandemic in August, 2020, NDA Immediate Past President Dr. Sheila Armstrong said, *"The delay or suspension of essential oral health care procedures has been proven to increase the rate of morbidity in the underserved communities that have been most affected by Coronavirus. It is the continuation of these essential services that may prove to be a mitigating factor in the survival rate of this vulnerable population that we serve."*

The need for more underrepresented minorities and African American dental providers has never been greater and the stakes for communities of color have never been higher. Research findings report that routine medical practice treats whites and blacks differently. Implicit bias and racism often result in inappropriate care and less pain management contributing to needless suffering and perhaps death. In

contrast, when treated by Black doctors, recent studies reveal that African American patients receive better care; have better health outcomes; receive more preventative services; and have more trust.

Currently,

- Less than 5% of dentists in the US are African American
- Average dental student debt is \$305,000; Black dentists report higher debt
- In 2018, fewer than 30% of African Americans over age 65 visited a dentist
- For those over 65, poor dental health is associated with lower quality of life
- Sixty-three percent of NDA members are active Medicaid providers compared to 30% of non-NDA members
- Only 50% of Medicaid eligible children receive dental care
- Over 60 million people live in areas with no access to dental care
- 10,000 more dentists are needed for underserved areas

Increasing the number of African American oral health professionals will increase access to quality care and accelerating the integration of medicine and dentistry will improve health outcomes in communities of color. *Dr. Clyde Yancy, Vice Dean for Diversity, and inclusion at Northwestern University's Medical School, stated in his recent writings that the COVID pandemic was linked to the sixfold increase in death rates among Black people in America – and called this a moment of “ethical reckoning.” He called on the health professional field “to contribute to the social reengineering needed to fully address health disparities- transforming values, laws and policies.”* (Yancy, C. W. (2020) COVID-19 and African Americans. *JAMA*, 323(19), 1891)

1. *Harper, H.J., et al. Chapter 23 Aetna and the National Dental Association: A model partnership for racial and ethnic health care equity. Treadwell, H.M. & Evans, C. A., Oral health in America-removing the stain of disparity. (2019) APHA Press. Washington, DC*
2. *Matthews, C. White paper for the National Dental Association (2016) Update on the oral-systemic link*

For more information about the Gala and to purchase tickets visit: [www.rtfds.org](http://www.rtfds.org)

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### **Ticket Sales, Sponsorship and Ads:**

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### **About the Robert T. Freeman Dental Society**

The Robert Tanner Freeman Dental Society, named after the first US African American dental school graduate, was founded on November 14, 1900 by graduates of Howard University College of Dentistry, who were denied membership in the local white dental associations. The original name was the Washington Society of Colored Dentists. It is the founding and local component of the National Dental Association. The history of the organization is rooted in advocacy for health as a matter of human rights and social justice.

The objectives of the Robert T Freeman Dental Society were and still remain to create fellowship, to cultivate the highest degree of excellence in the science and art of dentistry and to provide programs of continuing education for its membership and the community it serves. For almost fifty years, the Society fought valiantly to appoint a black dentist to the Board of Dental Examiners of the District of Columbia. This battle was won in 1950. Many of the members who formed the pillars of the Society also participated in the development of Howard University College of Dentistry's curriculum. As a result of their work, many of our members have gained national prestige and recognition in the field of dentistry.

Membership in this Society is open to all dentists practicing, teaching, and/or residing in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The membership roster includes hundreds of minority dentists who represent practitioners of general dentistry and all of the dental specialties. Our members currently mentor the Student National Dental Association.

**About Howard University College of Dentistry-**The College of Dentistry at Howard University was established in 1881. It is the fifth oldest dental school in the United States. As a teaching and patient care institution, the College has trained thousands of highly skilled dental professionals to serve their communities, particularly the underserved. Graduates are currently serving communities in 40 states and 53 foreign countries. More than 100 faculty members constitute one of the best trained dental faculties in the world, thus making our institution the Capstone for transforming competent students into leaders for America and the world. The HUCD mission includes the philosophy that education, research and service are inseparable constituents of a modern dental education. The College's primary goal is to remain a national resource for dental leaders and a comprehensive education and research institution which attracts highly motivated and academically accomplished students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

For more information: [www.healthsciences.howard.edu/education/colleges/dentistry](http://www.healthsciences.howard.edu/education/colleges/dentistry)

**About the National Dental Association-** Established in 1913, the NDA is the world's first and largest organization of ethnic minority oral health professionals. The NDA Mission: The National Dental Association promotes oral health equity among people of color by harnessing the collective power of its members, advocating for the needs of and mentoring dental students of color, and raising the profile of the profession in our communities. The organization is dedicated to representing the concerns of ethnic minorities in dentistry and to eliminating disparities in health in underserved communities. The NDA, a 501(c)3 entity with 38 local chapters in the U.S., is the umbrella organization for the NDA "family" of organizations: the Student National Dental Association (SNDA), the National Dental Assistants' Association, the National Dental Hygienists' Association, the Undergraduate SNDA, the Auxiliary to the NDA (spouses) and the NDA Foundation.

For more information: [www.ndaonline.org](http://www.ndaonline.org)

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