

Christine DeMattie – A Hygienist Story

How a heart for safety and community motivates one hygienist every day

Christine DeMattie found her way to hygiene by way of an unexpected personal connection. “My dad is a businessman, but I don’t have a head for business; my mother is a nurse and I didn’t have the stomach for nursing, so I went to get information from the local community college. I was born in Korea and my parents adopted me when I was a baby, and there was an advisor there who had also adopted a baby from Korea--I instantly felt a connection with her. I had tried dental assisting for eight months, so I knew a little bit about dentistry, but I wasn’t sure assisting was the right fit for me. The advisor and I talked about things I liked to do, and I found I really enjoyed focusing on one particular aspect of dental care, and doing it well.” That discovery led Christine to focus on hygiene.

Once she found her niche, Christine was committed, heart and soul. “I love the 1:1 connection with patients and helping them be comfortable seeing me. I like to figure out how I can help patients enjoy their visit. I love working with patients and providing education before and after treatment. Even after 25 years as a hygienist, I love taking intraoral pictures to show patients their bleeding gums, then comparing that to the after picture with no bleeding. That is always a ‘wow’ moment for them.”

Besides giving her all to her patients, Christine is also committed to giving back to her community. “For the past 16 years, I’ve gone to speak to schools for Dental Health Month in February, and I’ve been asked to speak at Career Day. Teachers ask me to speak about what I do as a hygienist and to give oral healthcare tips. A lot of the kids are really knowledgeable, and it’s fun to see some of them that are also our patients.”

Eventually, Christine’s practice made the decision to affiliate with Merit Dental, a Midwest Dental brand. “We have gained a lot [since the change] and are able to focus on being the best we can be. The team at Midwest Dental have supported and educated us so that we can educate our patients about oral hygiene. My doctor is awesome--I value her so much. We have an excellent team, and with COVID-19 we have all done whatever it takes to give patients excellent care.”

As an active part of that team, Christine has stepped into the role of Safety Officer for her practice. “I love safety, I really do--OSHA is my bag. Safety affects most aspects of our jobs, and it is so important to keep myself, my teammates and patients safe--safety just makes sense. As the Safety Officer, I am making sure that my team members are trained and knowledgeable. The more educated you are, the safer you can be, and understanding why we are doing something makes it easier to implement.”

In the face of the challenges resulting from COVID-19, Christine feels her calling to safety has never been more important. "My heart is for the patient, our doctor, and our staff, and my job is to do everything I can to increase safety for everyone. Probably 98% of the patients I've seen since we reopened have said, 'I am so glad you are back. I feel so safe.' I always spend a few minutes connecting with each patient and explaining the protective equipment I am wearing and why it is needed. I try to remember what it is like to be the patient."

During this time of crisis, the benefits of being part of a larger organization have been clear. "Midwest Dental supplied us with all the tools we needed, like face shields, and I appreciated that before we came back, there were town hall meetings to answer questions. More so than in a single dental office, you can always find an answer to a question or online course to learn more. We also have great benefits for CEs, healthcare, and vacation time."



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