

Introduction

By Dr. Bob Leonetti
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Welcome to the **SAID** Advocacy Tool Kit. **SAID** is an organization whose purpose is to educate and support dental professionals who have dedicated their careers to serving the needs of individuals with disabilities. The population we serve is a vulnerable one; often unable to advocate for themselves. We as Dental professionals are expert in the techniques required to diagnose and treat dental disease. The Dental professionals of **SAID** possess both skills and the motivation necessary to overcome the barriers to care often experienced by patients with disabilities.

SAID is dedicated to educate other professionals to treat patients with special healthcare needs. Many professionals would be willing to treat these patients but do not believe they have the requisite skills. To address this need, **SAID** has created a set of educational modules. These are available free of charge on our website www.saiddent.org.

However expert we are in Dentistry for Patients with Disabilities, our dental professionals sometimes fall short when it comes to advocating for our patients. And there are so many arenas in which advocacy is required. Institutional dentists must advocate for sufficient supplies, equipment, personnel, and time to provide optimum care for their patients. Dental Chiefs of Service must advocate at an institutional level and sometimes beyond to assure that their patients receive the best care possible. All Dental personnel by virtue of their training and knowledge are tasked with encouraging those in power to consider the needs of the most vulnerable clients. We as Dental Professional are responsible for lobbying Dental educators to include such training in dental, hygiene, and assisting curricula.

“Once you know, you can’t not know”. That is why advocacy is the third leg of the triangle that is our mission statement. Yet advocacy remains difficult for us. There are many reasons for this. While lack of time is one such reason; lack of training and confidence are the foremost reasons. We at **SAID** would like to provide a vehicle by which those who are experts in dentistry but novice at advocacy can gain guidance & assurance in the latter. In so doing, we hope to make advocacy less daunting and hence less labor-intensive for our membership. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

I wish to thank Dr. Joe Dicks, a pioneer in dental care for patients with disabilities, a former SAID President and the inspiration for this tool-kit.