



WELL SAID HEALTH

Episode 3 Show Notes — Dental Care is Vital Care

Season 1, Episode 3 • Live October 1, 2026 • Guest: Marissa Brubaker, RDH, BCPA • Runtime 40:35

Episode summary

Your mouth is treated like it isn't part of your body — separate insurance, separate providers, separate records. Dental hygienist and Board Certified Patient Advocate Marissa Brubaker has spent 20 years as a dental hygienist, and one working interview with a mobile dental company serving seniors led to her career as a dental advocate. She explains why gums don't bleed (tissue tears — and the bacteria head for your bloodstream), how dry mouth can quietly cascade into weight loss and withdrawal, and how her godfather Uncle Al's oral cancer was missed because nobody looked or asked. Then Robin turns it into a toolkit: the exact words for the dental chair, a big treatment plan, a second opinion — and one question to ask someone you love this week.

Timestamps

- **00:04 Cold open** — Your mouth is treated like it isn't part of your body — separate insurance, providers, and records.
- **02:02 What is a dental advocate?** — Helping people regain their own voice in a system that's hard to navigate.
- **02:43 The working interview** — A mobile dental job serving seniors in Florida — and the moment Marissa switched sides.
- **07:05 Where to report it** — The practice first — then the insurer, the attorney general, or the licensing board.
- **08:06 The tissue paper and the river** — Gums don't bleed — tissue tears. Where the blood really comes from, and where the bacteria go.
- **11:56 Mouth to brain, heart, and blood sugar** — Alzheimer's, arterial plaque, endocarditis — and the gum-diabetes feedback loop.
- **13:47 If you could only do one thing** — Floss — in a C-shape, at the gum line, where plaque starts.
- **15:03 The quiet cascade** — Dry mouth to a broken tooth to weight loss and withdrawal — it started in the mouth.
- **18:00 Uncle Al** — "Tough as nails," a bowl of soup at the Greek restaurant, and a diagnosis that came too late.
- **23:07 What someone should have asked** — No teeth doesn't mean done with the dentist — and the mouth is part of the body.
- **24:57 Why dentistry is separate** — Education, licensing, and insurance evolved apart. It shouldn't stay that way.
- **25:56 Choosing a dental plan** — The \$20-cheaper plan trap — check which dentists are in network first.
- **28:07 The Toolkit: no insurance, a toothache, and \$200** — Spend it on discovery — an exam and X-rays.

- **29:25 Facing an \$8,000 treatment plan** — Do I understand the problem? Did I have options? Am I comfortable?
- **30:39 Second opinions** — Come in with your goals, not your grievances.
- **33:01 One question for someone you love** — “Tell me how your mouth has been feeling.”
- **33:27 Slow it down** — It’s okay to ask them to repeat it, take a break, or come back for a 15-minute sit-down.
- **35:53 The Toolkit** — Robin’s recap: four sets of words to write down, plus this week’s homework.
- **39:43 Marissa’s health hacks** — Flossing every night, weightlifting, and tennis — keep it fresh.

The Episode 3 Toolkit

Four sets of words to put in your phone — the printable one-page version is the last page of this document:

1. **Ask someone you love:** “Tell me how your mouth and teeth have been feeling.” “How are your dentures fitting? Any sore spots?” Open-ended, not yes or no. And a mouth with no teeth still needs a dentist once a year for an oral cancer screening.
2. **Before you say yes to a treatment plan:** “Help me understand the problem. Walk me through my options.” “Can this be phased — and what’s the biggest problem first?” At any price. If you can’t picture the problem and repeat it back, you’re not ready to say yes.
3. **The second-opinion opener:** “It’s been a while since I’ve been to the dentist. I’m looking for a comprehensive evaluation. Here’s what matters to me most.” Don’t open with everything the last dentist did wrong — you’ll get a softer version of the truth. Your goals, not your grievances.
4. **Slow it down:** “Can I sit up and take a break?” “Can we finish this at another appointment?” Didn’t understand the plan? Ask for a 15-minute sit-down to go over it again.

Homework this week: (1) Ask one person you love the mouth question. (2) If money is a barrier, look up a dental school clinic or community health center. (3) Floss tonight — C-shape, at the gum line.

Find help & resources

An independent dental advocate works for you — not the dental office, not the insurance company. Look for BCPA (Board Certified Patient Advocate) after their name.

- **Watch:** [HealthAdvocateX Community Conversation with Marissa Brubaker](#) (YouTube)
- **Dental Advocacy Support Services** (Marissa’s practice) — dentaladvocacy.com
- **Greater National Advocates** (where you’ll find Marissa) — gnow.org • Dental advocates: gnow.org/advocates/dental.html
- **HealthAdvocateX** (co-founded by Robin) — healthadvocatex.org • Advocate directory: healthadvocatex.org/directory-professional
- **Community health centers** (sliding-scale fees) — findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov
- **Dental school clinics** — typically about half the cost of private practice.
- **Where to report a problem** — the practice first; then your dental insurer (billing issues), your state attorney general, or your state dental licensing board.

About our guest

Marissa Brubaker, RDH, BCPA, is a registered dental hygienist with 20 years of experience across clinical care, dental sales, insurance, and advocacy, and a Board Certified Patient Advocate. She founded Dental

Advocacy Support Services in Merrimack, New Hampshire, helping older adults, caregivers, and families navigate dental treatment decisions, insurance, and billing — especially in assisted living and memory care. She still works chairside as a clinician.

- Website: dentaladvocacy.com
- Marissa on Greater National Advocates: gnanow.org
- Marissa's HealthAdvocateX Community Conversation: [Watch on YouTube](#)

From Robin

Get the words and the confidence to navigate your care: ***The Secret Language of Healthcare: How to Ask for the Care You Deserve.*** [Find it on Amazon.](#)

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The Dental Toolkit

Four sets of words to keep in your phone — before your next appointment,
or before someone you love needs them

1 ASK SOMEONE YOU LOVE

“Tell me how your mouth and teeth have been feeling.”

“How are your dentures fitting? Any sore spots?”

Open-ended, not yes or no. And a mouth with no teeth still needs a dentist once a year for an oral cancer screening.

2 BEFORE YOU SAY YES

“Help me understand the problem. Walk me through my options.”

“Can this be phased — and what’s the biggest problem first?”

At any price. If you can’t picture the problem and repeat it back, you’re not ready to say yes.

3 THE SECOND-OPINION OPENER

“It’s been a while since I’ve been to the dentist. I’m looking for a comprehensive evaluation. Here’s what matters to me most.”

Don’t open with everything the last dentist did wrong — you’ll get a softer version of the truth. Your goals, not your grievances.

4 SLOW IT DOWN

“Can I sit up and take a break?”

“Can we finish this at another appointment?”

Didn’t understand the plan? Ask for a 15-minute sit-down to go over it again.

YOUR HOMEWORK THIS WEEK

1. Ask one person you love the mouth question this week. Share the episode — or the tissue paper story.
2. If money is a barrier, take one step: dental school clinics (about half the cost), community health centers (sliding scale). Infection and no dentist? Go to the hospital.
3. Floss tonight — C-shape, at the gum line.

WHEN MONEY IS TIGHT

Dental school clinics run about half the cost of private practice. Community health centers charge on a sliding scale. Infection and no dentist in sight? A hospital can help — nobody should have to live with an abscess.

findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov • gnanow.org • dentaladvocacy.com

From The Secret Language of Healthcare: How to Ask for the Care You Deserve by Robin Shapiro • NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

Hear the full story: wellsaidhealth.com