

Roadmap to Successful Employment in Dentistry



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Some of the information in this booklet is derived from the ADA Practice Management Series.

Introduction ...



**“I’ve earned my dental degree.....
.....Now what?”**

As you near the end of your dental education and prepare to enter the world of dentistry, you face decisions that can affect you for the rest of your life. You must decide whether you are going to continue your education, go into practice in some form, or enter the world of public service. Some people have been prepared for this decision since the day they entered dental school. Others, however, are looking at a full slate of opportunities. Perhaps you fall in the latter category.

The New Dentist Committee of the Arkansas State Dental Association has prepared this booklet to help you think through the many practice opportunities that await you after graduation. You are embarking on a journey into a profession that ranked third in a recent Gallup Poll for having earned the public's trust. A dentist's average income ranks in the top 8 percent of U.S. family income, and, even though preventive measures have resulted in fewer people suffering the effects of dental caries, our growing population will continue to demand more dental care because they are wealthier, live longer, and maintain more of their natural teeth.

The outlook for the dental profession is bright, so how are you going to position yourself to take advantage of it?

The purpose of this booklet is to help you examine all the appropriate options in selecting a type and style of dental practice that is right for you, and to guide you through some of the considerations you should make when choosing. Are you interested in a solo practice, associateship, group practice, public health, and military? The options are many, but you can only select one.

The Arkansas New Dentist Committee presents this booklet in an effort to be helpful to you as a future colleague, and, as always, our committee stands ready to assist you as you make this most important decision.

Practice Types and Styles



SOLO PRACTICE:

As a general rule, the majority of dental school graduates enter the world of solo practice. In a recent survey of Arkansas' new dentists, 79 percent entered practice on their own. Solo practice provides autonomy, independence, and the opportunity to own your own business. While the financial rewards of owning your own practice may be satisfying, the financial obligations and risks associated with starting your own practice should be considered prior to making that investment. Costs will include equipment, leasehold improvements or building, insurance, salaries, rent, utilities, supplies, and other expenses that are necessary to operate a business. Combined with the responsibility of staffing your practice and the necessity of calculating payroll, deductions, quarterly reports, workmen's compensation, state & federal taxes and other considerations, the new dentist can find he/she has made a significant investment of both money and time. In addition, your practice will be required to comply with federal regulations such as those imposed by OSHA.

On the upside, a solo practitioner maintains full control of the practice and can realize a higher income than dentists in other practice settings. As a solo practitioner, you have the freedom to select the manner in which you deliver dental care and the type of care you provide for your patients. When you own your own practice, you have the opportunity to create your own practice philosophies, policies, and procedures that are consistent with your own personal goals and preferences.

ASSOCIATE PRACTICE

The term "associate" refers to dentists who do not have ownership rights in the practice in which they work. As in a solo practice, there are advantages and disadvantages to becoming an associate in an existing practice. As an associate, you have little, if any, initial financial investment. On the other hand, an associate does not have the level of independence or autonomy to practice dentistry in the manner that the solo practitioner does.

For many people, an associateship provides a transitional period during which the new dentist can learn business management skills without being burdened by the actual responsibilities of owning and operating the practice. Such situations may develop into future practice ownership opportunities. Also, under an associateship, the new dentist has an opportunity to build relationships and camaraderie with other dentists in the practice who can serve as excellent resources for clinical decisions.

On the other hand, associates give up some of their independence and autonomy because they are working as an employee for another dentist. Associates may be unable to set their own work hours and holidays, and are required to abide by the policies and procedures determined by the owner of the practice. Conflicts can arise when you must practice according to policies that you may not agree with; therefore, you should carefully analyze office policies and guidelines before signing a contract to practice as an associate.

The practitioner should develop a comprehensive plan from the beginning, which may prevent either party from having unrealistic expectations. As with any contractual arrangement, the new dentist and employer are free to negotiate an arrangement, that is mutually beneficial, and all parties are better served when a win-win situation can be achieved. It is a good idea to have an attorney review the agreement before signing.

GROUP PRACTICE

Group practices in many ways resemble an associateship in that more than one dentist may practice in the same setting. However, unlike an associateship, the group practice may vary from one owner with several non-owner associates up to several dentists engaged in a partnership whereby each owns a portion of the practice.

The particulars of the contractual arrangement in a group practice may determine the benefits of selecting this practice option. The advantages and disadvantages may vary significantly with your position in the practice.

PUBLIC HEALTH • MILITARY SERVICE • FDS

Opportunities for the new dentist also exist in public health service, the military and Federal Dental Services. For more information, contact the following departments:

ARKANSAS PUBLIC HEALTH:

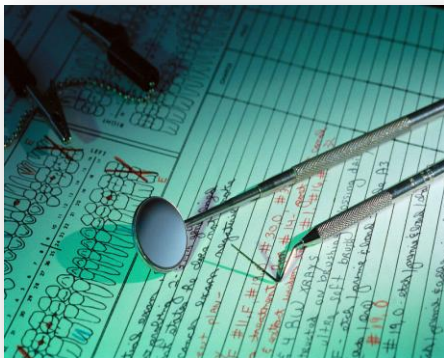
- Arkansas Department of Health, Community Health Services Division (501) 661-2160

MILITARY:

- U.S. Air Force Health Professions Recruitment Office (501) 985-2311
- U.S. Army Recruitment Office (501) 945-1605
- U.S. Navy Recruitment Office (501) 280-9964

FEDERAL DENTAL SERVICES:

(301) 443-1106 - Federal agencies employing dentists include the Department of Health and Human Services (*National Dental Service Corps, Indian Health Service, Federal Bureau of Prisons of U.S. Coast Guard*), and the Veterans Administration (800) 949-0002.



Demographic Questions



Whether you choose to begin a solo practice or become an associate in an existing practice, one of the most important decisions you will make is LOCATION. The location of a practice can be the single most important ingredient for success. A practice with high visibility on a heavily traveled street or in a popular shopping center increases the dentist's chances of attracting new patients. A community's population, average income, competition from other dentists and other factors must also be carefully considered before opening a practice in the area or joining a practice as an associate. Your personal lifestyle preferences should also be considered when making the decision regarding your practice location.

In its Practice Management Series, the ADA recommends the following considerations when selecting a site:

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- What is the year round climate?
- Are there other families in the area of similar age, and background who share your values?
- Are there recreational, educational opportunities?
- What are the career opportunities for your spouse?
- What cultural, social activities exist in the area?
- What churches/synagogues are in the area?
- What are the real estate values in the community?

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

The Health Resource Services Administration (HRSA) of the Department of Health and Human Services can provide information as to health profession shortage areas by county (301-594-0816.)

- Does this community need another dentist?
- Is the population stable?
- What are the ages of the established dentists in the community?
- Are other income sources such as teaching or consulting available to you while your practice is growing?

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Are you licensed in the state?
- Do people in the community value dental health?
- Are the dentists in the community friendly?
- Are sources of professional support such as study clubs available?
- Are qualified office and auxiliary personnel available at reasonable rates?

RESOURCES:

A number of valuable resources are available to provide the data you need in determining a practice location. The local dental society or dental supply house can be one source of information regarding the dental questions you might have. General practitioners and specialists in the area can also provide some assistance and may be good contacts for the future. Local financial institutions and the local chamber of commerce can also be helpful in gathering information on the business outlook in the area.

Any new dentist would be well served by ordering the following reports from the ADA Ordering Department (800-621-8099)

- "Distribution of Dentists in the United States, Facts for the Dentist Seeking a Location"
- "Survey of Dental Practice"
- "Facts About States"
- "State and County Demographic Reports"

The ADA Practice Management Series mentioned earlier in this booklet can be a very valuable resource as you plan to enter practice. Call 1-800-621-8099 for more information.

Also, the ASDA New Dentist Committee has published the "Roadmap to Starting a Successful Dental Practice" which can be obtained at no charge by calling (501)834-7650.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the Health Resource Services Administration can provide information identifying counties which are experiencing a shortage of health professionals.

Helpful Numbers

ADA Committee on the New Dentist
800-621-8099 Extension 2779

American Dental Association
211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611
800-621-8099
(312)440-2500
FAX (312)440-7494
Web Address: www.ada.org

Arkansas State Dental Association
7480 Highway 107
Sherwood, Arkansas 72120
(501) 834-7650
FAX (501) 834-7657
Billy Tarpley, Executive Director
Cheryl Ball, Membership Director
e-mail: asda@ardental.org
Web Address: www.dental-asda.org

Arkansas State Board of Dental Examiners
101 East Capitol Avenue, Suite 111
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
(501) 682-2085
FAX (501) 682-3543
Donna Cobb, Executive Director
Web Address: www.asbde.org

Arkansas Department of Health
4815 . Markham Street, Slot 41
Little Rock, Arkansas 72205
(501) 61-2595
FAX (501) 661-2055
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