

# new dentist news



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Dental school grad finds a practice, mentor through ADAPT

## Influencing your practice AS AN ASSOCIATE

BY KIMBER SOLANA

When Sean Aiken, D.M.D., graduated from the University of Louisville in 2018, he did what many new dentists looking for a job today: an associateship. Well, for him, it was two associateships in two separate practices in the Louisville area.

In one of these practices, Dr. Aiken said, it had some outdated technologies, including still using paper charts.

But how does a fresh-out-of-school employee dentist influence decision-making in an office led by a practice owner with decades of experience?

“You don’t want to come in with vastly different practice philosophies and make demands,” he said. “You can really turn people off, including the owner docs who have spent 30 to 40 years building their practice.”

Katie Stuchlik, D.D.S., said it’s a common challenge among new dentists in associate roles.

“It’s difficult to have much of a voice in materials and instruments used in the office,” said Dr. Stuchlik, who joined a practice as an associate after graduating in 2015 from the University of Texas School of Dentistry. “One of my friends doesn’t even have adequate suction in an office he works in, and another asked to order instruments and was told he can use what’s in the office. My experience hasn’t been far from each of theirs.”

Drs. Aiken and Stuchlik, who today are now practice owners themselves, share some insights on how associate dentists can take on a more active role in their practice. Dr. Stuchlik co-owns a practice she opened in 2018 in Houston; and in 2020, Dr. Aiken bought the Louisville practice he once joined as an associate.

*Continued on Page 4*

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# Alternative careers:

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A DENTAL DEGREE?

BY JENNIFER GARVIN

Many dentists consider career changes outside of treating patients for a variety of reasons including disability, stress and burnout or desire for change and new dentists are no exception. For some, it may be a matter of just wanting to pursue non-clinical opportunities that have spiked their interest.

### What can you do with a dental degree?



**Be an educator.** Academia needs dedicated educators. The ADA maintains a database on accredited dental education programs including dental schools, advanced dental programs, dental hygiene programs, dental assisting programs and allied programs at [ADA.org/CODA](https://ada.org/coda). There is also information on the American Dental Education Association's website at [ADEA.org](https://adea.org). It's important to note that being an educator doesn't have to mean just teaching in a dental environment. With their background in science, many dentists are naturals for teaching at the secondary or collegiate level or at technical schools.

**Share the knowledge.** Dental consulting is a broad field, but the most common type of dental consulting generally involves providing advice for practice management. Many practices seek assistance with areas such as financial management, team building and communication, practice start-up, appraisals and transitions, marketing, equipment and technology, and more.

Private dental benefits companies may also employ consultants to perform claims reviews

or work in other areas such as administration, management, research and policy development roles. Dental consultants may serve as a coordinator between a company's human resources department and its dental benefit plan provider. The scope of activities ranges from benefit analysis to cost effectiveness evaluation. In addition, benefit companies utilize dental consultants for claims adjudication.

**Consider public service.** Dentists can serve the public in several ways such as by working in leadership roles at public health facilities or in government by working for a local or state health agency.

**The ADA has tools that can assist dentists who may be thinking about a career change.** These include a self-assessment, advice on preparing a resume, how to practice interview skills, information on leaving a dental practice and more.

For those tools and a full list of non-clinical career opportunities, visit [ADA.org/alternativecareers](https://ada.org/alternativecareers). ■

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# Influencing YOUR PRACTICE AS AN ASSOCIATE

(continued from cover)



Sean Aiken, D.M.D.



Katie Stuchlik, D.D.S.

## Show tangible, intangible value

It took Dr. Aiken about three to six months feeling more comfortable at his associateships.

“At that point, I’ve gotten to know my assistants, the staff, my patients, the practice culture,” he said. “The dentistry becomes easier when you’re less worried about the day-to-day of the practice.”

So when it came time to make his suggestion in updating the practice, the conversation with the practice owner was also a little easier.

“I’ve been there long enough that I was able to express that this is where I wanted to be long term,” he said. “And I was able to share how updating a practice can ultimately help everyone, including the dental team and our patients.”

Providing your boss with research that relates to your specific practice setting can go a long way, said Dr. Stuchlik.

During her associateship, Dr. Stuchlik learned of a new discovery tool to enhance oral cancer screenings at a study club continuing education course.

“It seemed like a no-brainer to implement this product in our practice, but my student loan burden definitely couldn’t afford this instrument,” she said. “I stated my case to the practice owner and how I felt it was important to offer more extensive oral cancer screenings to our patient population. A few weeks and a visit from the company later, the practice now utilizes this product on a daily basis.”

## Importance of communication

It’s often not what you say, but how you say it, Dr. Aiken said.

You can be armed with all the research and data, but they all could be ineffective with the wrong approach.

“I would say be delicate when asking for changes,” he said. “I don’t think I recognized the importance

of this initially. When making suggestions, remember that you may come across as questioning the owner’s ability to run a practice.”

He added that as important it may seem to have a new dentist enter a practice with a fresh set of eyes, associates also need to see the importance of experience when leading the practice.

“Associates should come in with an open mind and be inquisitive,” Dr. Aiken said. “Being tactful also doesn’t hurt.”

## How does a fresh-out-of-school employee dentist influence decision-making in an office led by a practice owner with decades of experience?

### Don’t get discouraged if denied

Perhaps the research was insufficient. Maybe there are more aspects to the business you can’t understand yet as an associate.

“Ask the dentist you work for if there are any specific questions he or she has, and if there is any more research that can be done,” Dr. Stuchlik said.

“Every associateship is a learning opportunity,” she added. “Whether you have dreams to buy into a practice, open your own or always work as an associate, find a way to learn about the business side of the practice. In my short time at [my associateship], I learned a lot about what it takes to manage a staff, building expenses, supplies and all the little things outside of teeth.”

When Dr. Aiken made his suggestions in updating the technology in his practice, the owner was more than open to do whatever he wanted except one thing: changing the dental restorative material used in the practice.

“It’s definitely a give and take,” he said.

It’s one of the perks of being the boss, having the final say. Dr. Aiken would know. He was finally able to switch to the dental restorative material he preferred — when he became the practice owner. ■

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# Ask the Expert: WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING TO GO INTO SOLO PRACTICE?

BY CHRISTINE OLMSTEAD LOPEZ, CERTIFIED HEALTHCARE FINANCIAL PROFESSIONAL,  
BMO HARRIS BANK

**Dear Christine:** *I am an associate dentist who is thinking big for my future! I want to see my name on the door and own my own practice. I have not had much time to be mentored in the business aspects of dentistry — what challenges should I expect?*

— Ready to Fly Solo

**Dear Ready:** Many dental associates do eventually want to step out on their own — practice ownership is among the professional pathways that can meet your personal and career goals. But establishing your own practice may require the acquisition of an existing one.

Here are some basic considerations to ensure you find a practice that meets your unique requirements:

- **Timing.** Have you built basic business acumen, including managing employees, negotiating contracts, monitoring cash flow and marketing? In BMO Harris Bank's experience, we've found that associates who acquire a practice after at least two years of practice experience are best positioned for success.
- **Lifestyle.** Do you want to be based in an urban, suburban or rural area? How many days a week do you wish to work?

- **Practice size.** Managing a practice of 1,200 patients has different demands than a practice of 2,000 patients. Consider not only the time required with your patients, but the attention required for additional team members. This decision will also drive how many days a week you'll need to work, and the income available to support your lifestyle choices.

- **Transition plan with the selling dentist.** Do you want them to stay on for a period to ensure smooth transition of patients? Or do you prefer little to no influence from the seller? Regardless, a sound transition plan is critical to ensure you retain the patients and staff that will maximize your chances of success.

One of the most significant challenges for new dentists who are acquiring a practice is securing financing. Developing a business plan and gathering other necessary documentation may be outside of your comfort zone. Be prepared to consult with a team of experts, including an attorney, accountant and lender, to help with the initial practice valuation and financing.

In the end, acquiring a dental practice is as much a lifestyle choice as it is a financial one. That's why it's essential to both carefully consider your short- and long-term goals and be open to advice. ■

## Acquiring a dental practice is as much a lifestyle choice as it is a financial one.

A commercial banker since 2006, Ms. Olmstead Lopez advises mid- to large-size practices, leveraging her background in commercial credit underwriting and structuring, and providing industry-specific expertise and local market insight.

Editor's note: This article is provided by BMO Harris Bank, the ADA Member Advantage-endorsed provider for practice financing. Call 1-833-276-6017 or visit [bmoharris.com/dentists](http://bmoharris.com/dentists) for more information.

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# influences

## ON YOUR CAREER PATH



**Jessica Blanco, D.M.D.**, *owner of a solo pediatric practice*: I chose to become a pediatric dentist simply to give children a more positive dental experience, to try and help take away the fear of the dental experience and turn it into a calming and fun experience. That way, they carry those positive and fun experiences into their adulthood and they do not fear the dentist nor neglect their oral health.



**Jasmine Khedkar, D.M.D.**, *consultant with past dental service organization experience*: I love the clinical part of dentistry, and the management and administrative aspect has always fascinated me. I wanted to learn how business works. I enjoy sharing my knowledge and experience with the dental community on business acumen, revenue cycle management, office management and the power of referrals.



**Addison Killeen, D.D.S.**, *owner of a group practice, author and coach*: I get the best of both worlds — mix my week with a few days of clinical dentistry, with a few days of consulting and writing. I follow what gives me more energy, and for a few days a week, I love seeing patients and being a part of my community. However, passing along knowledge through writing and coaching inside Dental Success Network is even more invigorating, so I love the days I spend doing that as well.



**Alayna Schoblaske, D.M.D.**, *dental director at a federally qualified health center*: It gives me the opportunity to serve patients who have traditionally been overlooked by our health care system because of their income, housing situation, immigration status, preferred language and more. I love collaborating with and learning from the nine other dentists in my clinic and value the teamwork and support they provide.



**Shelly Taylor, D.M.D.**, *periodontics resident and consultant with a nonprofit*: Health disparities in under-resourced communities are unacceptable. My goal is to combine a passion for public health and periodontics to contribute meaningful innovations and advocacy to improve the health and oral health of all people, especially those who need it the most.

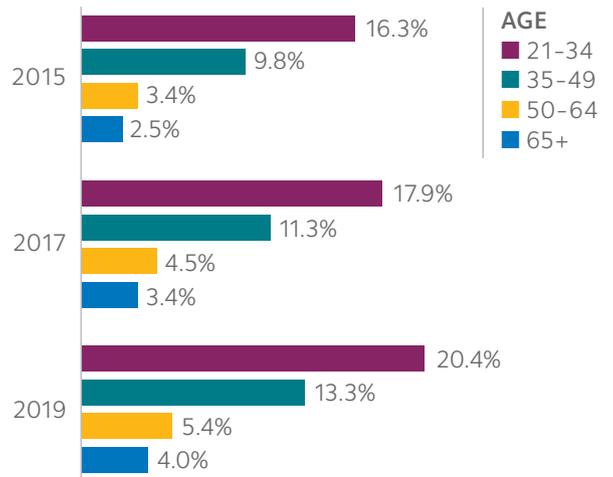
# Shifting PRACTICE PATTERNS

**Traditional solo practices are becoming less common as dentists gravitate toward group practices, a trend that is likely to continue, according to the ADA Health Policy Institute (HPI).** Over the last two decades, fewer dentists are working as solo practitioners. About 2 in 3 dentists were in solo practice in 1999. That proportion decreased to 1 in 2 in 2019; among dentists under 35, 1 in 4 was in solo practice that year.

Practice ownership rates have also declined, with 85% of dentists owning their practice in 2005 compared to 76% in 2019. This decrease in ownership was more evident among dentists under 35, a drop from 49% in 2005 to 31% in 2019.

While private practice ownership rates have declined, group practice affiliation has risen. In 2019, 10% of dentists were affiliated with dental service organizations (DSOs). HPI notes that this number is a conservative estimate based HPI's current data; the share is likely to be higher. A DSO is a group practice model that manages the administrative, marketing and business side of a dental practice on behalf of dentists. The DSO market share varies significantly across age groups. One in 5 dentists under 35 were affiliated with a DSO in 2019, according to HPI's most current data. For more information, visit [ADA.org/HPI](https://ada.org/HPI). ■

## DENTISTS AFFILIATED WITH A DENTAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION (DSO) BY AGE



Source: ADA Health Policy Institute Office Database

## In case you missed it



### New registry initiative can help advance dentistry's clinical evidence base

New dentists seeking to improve oral health outcomes in their practices have a new instrument in hand: the ADA's Dental Experience and Research Exchange.

Full story: [ADA.org/newregistry](https://ada.org/newregistry)



Image: Henryk Sadura / Tetra Images / Getty Images

### New dentists urged to mobilize to oppose Medicare Part B dental benefit proposal

Dentists are encouraged to make their voices heard on a legislative proposal that would put dental care in Medicare Part B.

Full story: [ADA.org/mobilize](https://ada.org/mobilize)



### Takeaways from the 'Mental Health, Dentistry and You' webinar

The ADA hosted a webinar with NAMI Chicago, a chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in a first of a series of education programming on mental health and wellness.

Full story: [ADA.org/wellnesswebinar](https://ada.org/wellnesswebinar)



On left: **Hannah Morgan, D.D.S.**  
On right: **Jennifer Knoll, D.D.S.**

# Dental school grad FINDS A PRACTICE AND A MENTOR THROUGH ADA PRACTICE TRANSITIONS

BY DAVID BURGER

## ADA program's 'matchmaking services' looks to connect dentists through shared philosophy of care

*Sparta, Wis.* — Hannah Morgan, D.D.S., grew up in small-town Alaska, went to college in Montana, and then attended the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry.

As she approached her dental school graduation in 2021, she knew the type of climate she wanted to practice in: cold and rural.

Through ADA Practice Transitions, Dr. Morgan found what she was looking for, as well as a willing mentor.

She is now a happy associate at the Sparta, Wisconsin, practice of Jennifer Knoll, D.D.S.

"As a new graduate, I wanted to find a mentor in my employer," Dr. Morgan said. "I felt I did not have the experience or confidence to go straight into ownership after graduation. Therefore, I looked for practices that had an owner eager to educate and, as an added bonus, a pathway to ownership. I looked for a practice that had the same philosophy of patient care that I had."

Powered by the ADA, ADA Practice Transitions supports independent dentistry by helping dentists buy or sell a practice, hire an associate or find a job. ADAPT, a service of the ADA Business Innovation Group, matches dentists who are looking to join a practice with owners who are seeking an associate or someone to purchase their practice. It brings dentists all the tools, information and support that is vital to the process while facilitating matches based on what matters to dentists the most — their philosophy of care. Each client works closely with an ADA adviser who provides training and coaching — all with a focus on allowing them to achieve their individual and mutual goals.

Dr. Morgan first heard about ADA Practice Transitions at a lunch-and-learn during dental school.

"I was intrigued by their matchmaking services for dentists all based on philosophy of patient care," Dr. Morgan said. "Since it was a service through the ADA, I also felt confident the service only had their dental clients' best interests in mind."

Using the services of an ADA adviser, one of Dr. Morgan's first potential matches was Dr. Knoll.

"Dr. Knoll reached out to me first via email," Dr. Morgan said. "Although our advisers recommended a phone call, I was happy to hear that Dr. Knoll also preferred email and we could chat back and forth whenever we had spare time. Even through email, I could sense Dr. Knoll was energetic, eager, caring and overall someone who I would like to be around."

They shared more than 30 emails before contracts were even signed.

"Dr. Knoll had the ability to make me excited to join the dental workforce and specifically, her team," Dr. Morgan said.

Dr. Morgan learned that Dr. Knoll's practice was growing and busy, with an average of 45 new patients each month. Dr. Knoll was one of only three dentists in the town in western Wisconsin, all of whom are very busy, especially because three other dentists have retired in the past seven years.

Dr. Morgan raved about her experience using ADAPT.

"It's free to sign up, why not try it out?" she said. "I had nothing but a great experience. I felt a lot of relief knowing I had found a job almost six months before I graduated. I found that I was one of the first of my classmates to have done so. The process is efficient, easy and even fun. After working at the office I have chosen, I am incredibly glad I tried ADAPT." ■

## Real Customers, Real Results:



"I was intrigued by their matchmaking services for dentists all based on philosophy of patient care."

**Hannah Morgan, D.D.S.**



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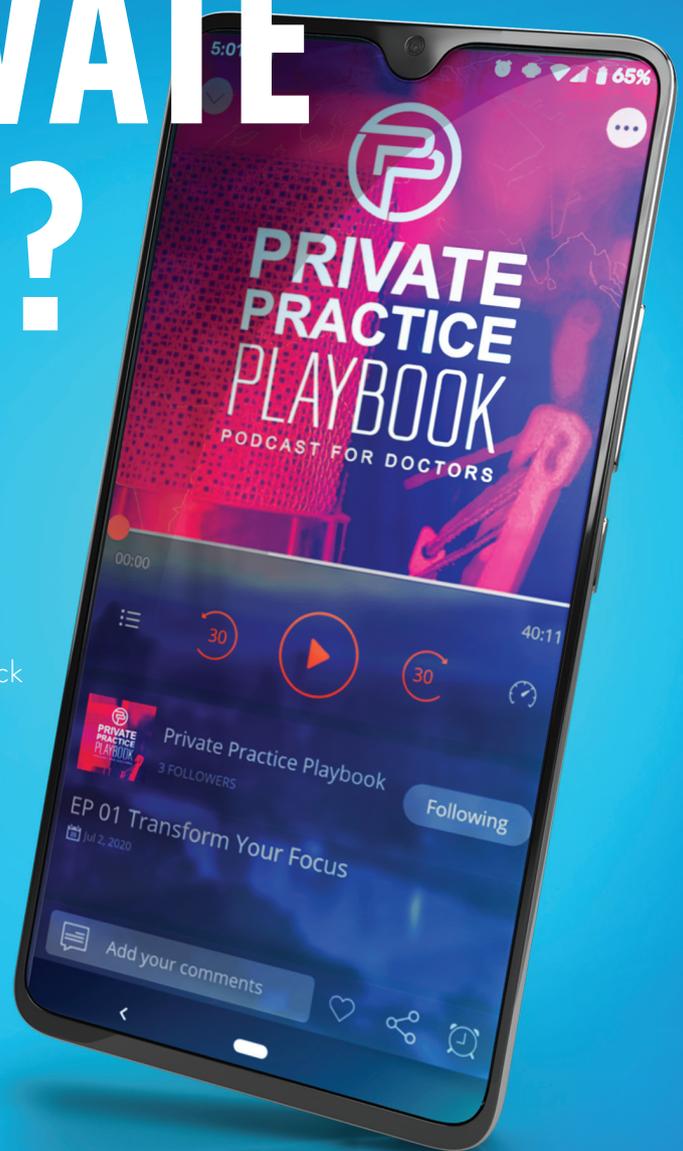
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