

Is there life after dental practice ownership?

Dentists often put off selling their practices because they are concerned about life after dentistry.

What will they do with all those extra hours, how will they cope with leaving behind the identity that has defined them for decades? This series of articles explores the very busy lives of some of Practice Sale Search's clients, former-practice owners who have embraced post-sale life.

Name: Ram Das and Chitra Das

Ram Das Graduated 1979 from Bombay

Chitra Graduated 1986 from Bombay

Moved to Australia in 2002

Practice Owned: Divine Smiles, Nundah, Qld

Brief Career Summary:

Chitra and I met in college in Bombay, she was doing her undergraduate course and I was doing my Masters. She is 8 years younger than me.

After graduating, I did a stint with the Indian Navy and had a flourishing practice in Trivandrum (India).

In 1999 we decided to leave India and move to New Zealand. I had a job as a dentist for the Royal New Zealand Air Force base in Ohakea, and Chitra worked in the Palmerston hospital as chief dental officer. The RNZAF felt like an easy job. There were only 600 personnel and they were all dentally fit. I had a lot of free time, so I cooked, we'd go to the air force shooting range, and had time to spend with our young kids (9 and 11 at that time). I created work by learning complex things to keep myself occupied. I left the air force because neither of us felt professionally motivated, it was too laid back.

From there we moved to NSW. We both took jobs running the Wingecarribee



Community Health Centre in Bowral. After 6 months we realised that we wanted to own our own business. We came to Brisbane and rented a place at a medical centre and started a practice from scratch in 2002.

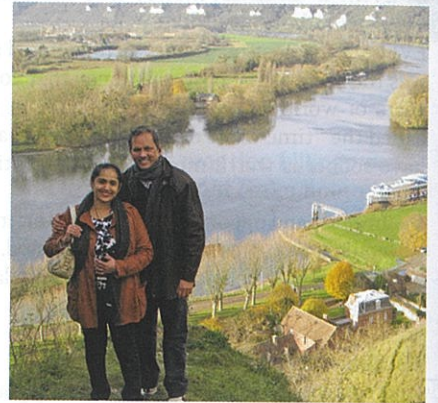
We were there for 5 years as tenants, and then we bought a petrol station next door and converted it into a dental practice (5 rooms, 4 functional chairs) and moved our patients there in 2007. We had a few dentists come and go, but it was primarily just the two of us. We loved the independence and control, having our own patients and always wanting to do our best for them. My wife and I work very well together. I am a Fellow of the RACDS and have a Masters in Implant Dentistry and Chitra has pursued a special interest in advanced sleep-related dental issues, TMD and Orthodontics, which are very complimentary skills for a practice to have.

Why did you sell?

There were a lot of reasons.

We have elderly parents in India, who we know may need our attention and presence in the future. We wanted to have the flexibility to be there, without the practice's responsibilities hanging over us.

We wanted to concentrate more on what we like most, to mentor and pass our combined 35-year experience and knowledge on to the younger generations.



I have a Masters in implants and always pursued further study and experience in this. I was mentoring some dentists at UQ. I am also providing implant training to some younger dentists in their practice and hope to do more of that in the future.

What was the process of selling like?

It took a long time to find the right person who we felt comfortable with. We are staying on for 2.5 years. Chitra works 3.5 days per week and I work 4.5 days. The way we have set things up, it doesn't feel different being employees. The practice is our baby and, although we have handed it over, we are still nurturing it. Everything looks the same, we have no pressure from the new owners. Chitra has gained some staff responsibilities, but the headache of red tape and admin has been taken away.

What now?

We are young to have sold, but we have lots we want to do.

We have more time to visit our elderly parents, even though we can't stay with them for long periods of time yet. We hope an employee dentist will come in soon so we can transition slowly.

My daughter is an aerospace engineer at NASA, and my son is training to be a surgeon. He is in Victoria, she is in Los Angeles. When we become grandparents, we want to be able to spend more time with them.

We have been workaholics for 45 years. I am sure we will find new opportunities.

I can see us mentoring and staying in the profession – but we will not own another practice again. We might even take time out and spend 6 months in India. We love animals, and would like to get involved in a charity that helps animals. ♦

