

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: Dr Paul Hagley

Age: I was 59 when I sold (July 2023)

Graduated: BDS Sydney 1987

Practice Owned: Darling Dental, Tamworth NSW

Tell us about your practice

In 1993, after working in the public hospital system in Sydney and Newcastle for five years, I decided to move back to the area where I grew up in country NSW.

I found an opportunity to join a practice in Tamworth (I grew up in Gunnedah, an hour north of there). The practice was owned by Bruce Stewart, a wonderful dentist and former president of ADA NSW. He was an active member of the local community and, by divine coincidence, we shared a passion for rugby. Bruce was a great mentor to me, and he and his wife became like second parents.

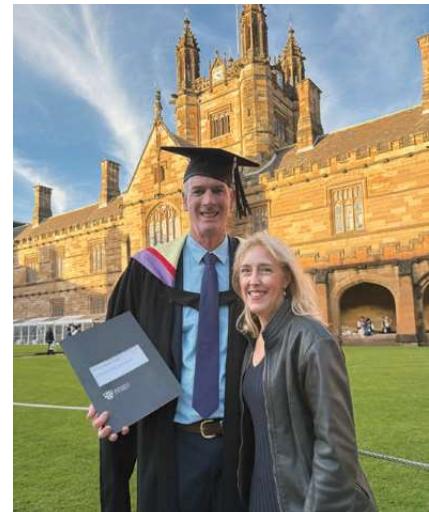
We worked flat out, 830am-6pm in a small building in Tamworth, and if I managed to get an hour for lunch that was a terrific surprise. After six months of working for Bruce, I bought in and became a partner.

It was sometimes hard to recruit dentists to regional NSW, but we took the view that if we build it, they will come ... and we were right. I bought a new building for the practice, and we renovated and extended it twice. In the end it was equipped with eight surgeries, a lab and dedicated OPG/CBCT room.

Over last 25 years, I estimate that we have had at least 22 different recent graduate dentists, who each usually spent 2-3 years working at our practice. In every case, we made sure that they found it a wonderful learning environment.

Why did you decide to sell at 59?

I took some advice from Simon at Practice Sale Search. He told me that the best way to maximise my practice value was to sell at



a time when I had a fair amount of energy left in the tank. A lot of dentists wait too long and decide to sell after fatigue has set in, the practice and its value has started to fade, and they have no energy or passion left. I feel like I sold at the right time in this respect.

What have you done since selling?

Clinical work

I have worked in the practice in a reduced capacity since the sale. The buyers have been a good fit. They liked how we did things and didn't try to change anything. They really just took over the admin and management burden.

University

Just before selling, I started a two-year Masters degree at Sydney University in pain management, specifically orofacial pain. A lot of processes are the same, whether it's mouth, lower back, etc. I was always interested in it, but I couldn't do it when I was an owner. I have just completed these studies.

Rugby

Since selling, I've started mentoring and coaching rugby referees.

My love of rugby goes back to school. I played a bit, but I couldn't afford to

injure my hands at university, so I started refereeing.

I started doing suburban games and worked my way up through the ranks. I was selected to referee in Fiji for the Pacific Rim under 20s tournament in the mid-1990s, but I have essentially been involved in refereeing country rugby games ever since moving to Tamworth.

I would have loved to become an international referee, but to do that I would have needed to stay in Sydney.

Future Plans

My wife and I want to move to the Gold Coast as some stage in next few years. Having lived most of my life inland, I'm keen to take up sailing - I like the idea of it! I also envisage myself doing some teaching at Gold Coast University and maybe doing some clinical work in the public sector. I'd love to be involved in volunteer organisations too. I could see myself helping in Surf Lifesaving, St Vincent de Paul or the Filling the Gap program.

We have also recently become grandparents and are looking forward to enjoying this stage of our lives.

It will be great to do some more travelling, having spent a fantastic time in France in 2023 for three weeks at the Rugby world Cup. ♦