

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: Stephen McCrea

Age: 59 when I sold

Graduated: Sydney Uni 1988

Practice Owned: Ellen St Dental, Wollongong

Tell us a bit about your practice

I am originally from Wollongong, so I always wanted to own a practice here. When I first came across my practice in 1992, it was owned by 3 older dentists. Two of them lived in Sydney, worked part time and were looking to sell. I bought both of them out and became partners with the remaining owner and started working there full time.

I worked in partnership with that owner for 3 years before he wanted to



retire. I bought him out and brought Louise Johnson on board as an assistant dentist in 1997. Louise bought into the practice in to become a partner in 2001. We started to grow from there. We set up a third surgery, then we brought in some assistant dentists and a part-time hygienist.

The practice grew further and we relocated in 2007 to the premises where the practice is now, with 6 surgeries. Shamila Gangaram bought in and became a third partner in 2007 (she had worked with us for several years). The three of us worked well together as partners for many years.

Why did you decide to sell?

In 2020 and 2021, when Covid restricted trading, I was in my late 50s. I spent time fishing, did yoga, walked the dogs. I took stock and thought about everything and just realised that there was more to life than work. My father got Alzheimer's disease quite young, at 63. You only get one crack at life, and you never know what's coming around the corner, and I don't want to think I wasted my time.

At the end of 2024, we decided to start exploring selling. We met with Simon from

PSS and he was impressed with the practice, and in 2025 he brought us 3 offers from 3 different buyers. We liked two of them and one simply put in an offer with better terms and financial arrangements/conditions, so we accepted.

We are all still working there, we have a 3-year earn-out. Nothing feels different for us yet.

I'd like to drop down my clinical hours in a year or so. Dentistry is what I do, it doesn't define me, it's not who I am. I've never had the worry about "who am I without it".

Tell us about your life outside of Dentistry

Game shows

I've always liked trivia nights, watched game shows on television, and then one day I thought I'd give it a crack. Angela (my wife) and I went on The Chase (I was on in 2001, Angela was on 2002). We both won! Then we both went on Millionaire Hotseat in 2003 and won, and then I was on Mastermind in 2024 and made the grand final in 2025! We have applied for Tipping Point, Angela has got in, I am waiting.

Photography

I have been taking photos since I was a kid; I shoot landscapes, travel and sports. My photos are all up in the surgery. I've had some patients buy them.

Travel

We love to travel. I recently went to London with my son to see Arsenal and also recently went to Africa the Maldives and Iceland.

Any advice for practice owners thinking about selling?

My wife once said something that really resonated with me – "you always remember the time with the kids, not the patient you saw at 3 on a Friday". Many people seem to lose sight of what's important. ♦

