

ABSTRACT

This Point/Counterpoint article discusses the transformation of dental practice from the traditional solo/small-group (partnership) model of the 1900s to large Dental Support Organizations (DSO) that support affiliated dental practices by providing nonclinical functions such as, but not limited to, accounting, human resources, marketing, and legal and practice management. Many feel that DSO-managed group practices (DMGPs) with employed providers will become the setting in which the majority of oral health care will be delivered in the future.

Viewpoint 1 asserts that the traditional dental practice patterns of the past are shifting as many younger dentists gravitate toward employed positions in large group practices or the public sector. Although educational debt is relevant in predicting graduates' practice choices, other variables such as gender, race, and work-life balance play critical roles as well. Societal characteristics demonstrated by aging Gen Xers and those in the Millennial generation blend seamlessly with the opportunities DMGPs offer their employees.

Viewpoint 2 contends the traditional model of dental care delivery—allowing entrepreneurial practitioners to make decisions in an autonomous setting—is changing but not to the degree nor as rapidly as Viewpoint 1 professes. Millennials entering the dental profession, with characteristics universally attributed to their generation, see value in the independence and flexibility that a traditional practice allows. Although DMGPs provide dentists one option for practice, several alternative delivery models offer current dentists and future dental school graduates many of the advantages of DMGPs while allowing them to maintain the independence and freedom a traditional practice provides.

KEYWORDS

dentists, dental group practice, private practice, practice management, professional autonomy, ownership, professional practice location

THE AUTHORS

Viewpoint 1:

Dr Cole is retired from private oral/maxillofacial surgery practice in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Dr Dodge is Dean, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Dentistry, San Antonio, Texas

Dr Findley practices general dentistry in Plano, Texas

Dr Young is Dean Emeritus, University of Oklahoma College of Dentistry, Norman, Oklahoma

Viewpoint 2:

Dr Horn practices general dentistry in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dr Kalkwarf is Dean Emeritus, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Dentistry, San Antonio, Texas

Dr Martin is retired from private general dentistry practice in Lincoln, Nebraska

Dr Winder practices pediatric dentistry in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Direct correspondence about this Point/Counterpoint to Dr Kenneth Kalkwarf at kalkwarf@uthscsa.edu.

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