

NORTHERN ONTARIO IS CALLING YOU



I have composed multiple versions of this article over the past few months – several in my mind, and a few in proper draft form. Each version has the same take home message which is important and shared throughout the article.

In the interest of catering to a broad audience, please indulge me in my attempt to connect with as many people as possible – particularly dentists who are early in their career.

Version 1 – The altruistic message borne from experience.

Most of my career as a practicing dentist was spent in Huntsville, Ontario. To those in the GTA, Muskoka is considered ‘the north,’ and many thousands of people brave congested highways every weekend to enjoy the serenity and adventure that this area provides. At the same time, living in Huntsville still provided easy access to larger centres including Toronto - only a two-hour drive away. Practicing in this area also made sense professionally – less competition, lower cost of living, significant population growth and all manner of lifestyle options.

Since selling my practices and taking a long sabbatical, I have reinstated my license and am doing limited locum work with a focus on supporting practice owners who may be considering a transition. Most of my attention has been focused on the true north of Ontario (as opposed to the ‘north-lite’ of Muskoka). I have found a multitude of practices with almost unlimited work, seeking associate dentists. These offices typically provide straight forward general dentistry for appreciative patients. Attractive compensation packages are offered – and some include significant benefits that are not available in larger cities. Many of you should look into this further.

Version 2 – The practical message – less emotional and more business focused.

Early on in my career, I found it exceedingly difficult to imagine looking ahead in five or ten-year blocks of time. Building wealth seemed to be a low priority when my colleagues first started earning a dentist-income and could finally afford nicer things (that they felt they deserved). Fast forward to today where levels of student debt have skyrocketed, practices are significantly more expensive to purchase, and management is more complicated – all of which may make working as an associate seem far more sensible than owning a practice.



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However, working as an associate in a major urban centre comes with trade-offs. Do you have someone watching over your shoulder? Do you feel pressured to reach certain goals without the experience needed to produce efficiently? Do you have the communication skills required to allow patients to select the level of dentistry that is appropriate for them? Can you even begin to build wealth when this new level of income is still barely covering rent, student loans, and professional expenses (license, memberships, insurance, etc.)?

Wealth building should begin the day you receive your license. Not because it can buy you stuff, but because it can buy you freedom. The freedom to practice because you want to – not because you have to, the freedom to engage in your passions outside of dentistry, and the freedom to support worthy causes at a truly meaningful level. I am not saying you cannot do it as an associate in a city oversaturated with dentists, but there are far better options. You should look into them!

Version 3 – The preachy ‘Boomer’ message

I used to often hear that getting your dental license usually meant you knew ‘just enough to not kill someone.’ If you subscribe to that idea, why stick around ultra-competitive areas without the skills to compete?

Dental schools have so much to fit into a four-year curriculum, that it is unreasonable to expect a recent graduate to have a high level of competence in any particular area. Many of the skills needed to become an excellent clinician are simply developed by doing. Northern communities are desperate for dental professionals, and again, newer dentists will gain immediate experience in whichever categories of dentistry interest them most.

And get this – the wealth building process can begin right away. As noted earlier, let us start with a much lower overall cost of living. Continue with a full schedule and very favourable compensation. There is so much culture and natural beauty, and the people are friendly and welcoming. I could go on and on...

The number one reason dentists give for not considering these opportunities is, ‘it will take me away from my family/friends/networks.’ But it doesn’t have to.

The five larger northern centres of Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, North Bay, and Timmins all have airports that serve Toronto frequently and directly – it is easy to go home one or more times a month.

What if you made a commitment to associate for three to five years, or buy a practice in northern Ontario (or any province)? That small ‘sacrifice’ would certainly provide a fantastic foundation for your future. You might even fall in love with it! In my experience, success often comes to those willing to do things that others are not.

The worst-case scenario? Having much less debt and a nice little nest egg to go practice hunting back home. Owning a dental practice anywhere in Canada remains an exceptional investment. You should all really look into this!!!

So, there you have it – hopefully a compelling argument for dentists to look at their future a little differently.

If you want to chat about dentistry, are interested in discussing a move up north, or you want to hear about specific opportunities available right now, please reach out at drew@roicorp.com or **705-985-7253**.

See you at the ODA ASM in April

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