

Dental Hygiene Beyond the Traditional Practice Model

Is a DSO Business Model Right for You?

Over the 36 years I have been in the oral health care profession, I have seen the profession grow and change tremendously, and I must say it's an exciting time to be in dentistry. New technology such as electronic dental records, digital radiography, oral cancer screening devices and lasers (to name just a few), have changed how we, as dental hygienists, define and deliver quality care to the patients we serve. However, just as new technology has changed the way we address oral health, new business models are changing the way we deliver patient care. I am fortunate to be part of a growing business model that offers an alternative to the traditional private practice. This model has offered me and many other dental hygienists in leadership positions a platform to help support the clinical best practices and operational standards for a large group of dental practices. This business model is referred to as a Dental Support Organization (DSO.)

For those of you who are not familiar with a DSO, a DSO contracts with an owner dentist or group of owner dentists to provide the best in comprehensive business support services. This includes, but is not limited to, administrative functions such as human resources, accounting and billing, compliance, information technology and marketing. Additionally, there is support for the owner dentist in implementing their own clinical best practices in an efficient, cost-saving manner through well-established systems and protocols. The DSO model allows the supported

dentist to focus on the practice of dentistry and developing clinicians while the business team focuses on handling all the administrative duties needed to run a profitable and sustainable business.

As the practice of dentistry becomes a more complicated business due to complex state and federal regulations, more and more dentists are turning to a DSO to help them navigate and thrive in a complicated business environment. This in turn has opened up new employment opportunities for dental hygienists both clinically and in the business side of dentistry.

Clinical dental hygienists working in a DSO supported practice typically have the ability to work full-time or part-time depending on their need. For hygienists working full-time, medical and dental benefits along with a 401K plan are generally offered as part of the benefits package. Additionally, for hygienists interested in career development or leadership opportunities beyond chairside dentistry, the DSO model may provide that career path.

For example, many DSOs employ a dental hygienist for non-clinical roles, such as working collaboratively with the supported dentists to define clini-



cal best practices and to establish operational protocols specific to hygiene. In addition, many DSOs employ dental hygienists to be available at the request of supported owner dentists to serve as regional field coaches to mentor and develop newer or less experienced hygienists in established clinical best practices and communication skills. Hygiene mentors also provide leadership by hosting continuing education meetings that bring together hygienists within a geographic region for continuing education and clinical development. These meetings foster clinical collaboration and bring forth a sense of community to a profession that can sometimes feel isolated in a traditional practice model.

As dental hygiene leader within a DSO business model, I feel blessed to support and work collaboratively with clinicians such as Ashley Quezada, RDH. Ashley is currently the president-elect for the San Diego, California, component of the American Dental Hygienists' Association. Ashley has been working in a dental practice

supported by Pacific Dental Services ("PDS") for approximately two years. I reached out to her for comments about working in this environment, and this is what she had to say:

I personally love the PDS model because it works off of an individual's commitment to a group effort. It allows for an impeccable patient-hygienist relationship, built from doctor-hygienist collaboration.

Other exciting opportunities of working with a DSO such as PDS include the ability to serve in our local communities and around the world. Through its We Serve Department and the Pacific Dental Services Foundation, PDS provides its supported clinicians and team members opportunities and a platform to connect with community partners and to give back using their skills and talents. Like most health care providers, dentists, dental hygienists and dental assistants have an innate desire to care for people

above and beyond their responsibilities within the dental practice. PDS-supported clinicians and team members have the opportunity to volunteer at mobile dental clinic events in their local communities and to serve the underprivileged in Ethiopia, Guatemala and Fiji. In 2015, PDS-supported clinicians provided more than \$6.1 million in donated dentistry, serving over 3,400 patients.

If you enjoy a sense of community, have a heart to serve and are interested in career development or if you would like to coach, publish or lecture, you might want to consider a non-clinical career with a DSO that can provide that type of career path. ■

Jan LeBeau, RDH, BS, has been involved in the practice and business of dental hygiene for over 35 years. She is currently the chair of Dental Hygiene Support for Pacific Dental Services and serves as the committee chair of Regulatory Affairs and co-chair of Laser Safety for the Academy of Laser Dentistry.

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