

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: Anthony Spink

Age: I was 50 when I sold, I am now 51.

Graduated: 1991 from U Qld

Practice Owned: Brighton QLD (Northern suburbs of Brisbane)

The first dentist job I had was a government job, working for a year as an itinerant dentist in the Aboriginal communities near Cairns. I then worked for the government in Bowen for 1.5 years, before moving back to Brisbane. I worked in Brisbane as an associate for 5 years, before opening my own practice from scratch in Sandgate. We were there for 20 years (although we did relocate the premises in 2007).

Why did you sell at 50? That seems young.

I turned around and realised that, after 20 years of ownership, I had never had more than 6 days off in a row. We had never been able to have a proper vacation.

I had been thinking of stepping back when I got in touch with Practice Sale Search (PSS). Brighton is on the very north side of Brisbane, a long way out of the urban part. I was quite surprised how many people PSS found that were interested in buying the practice.

After some time on the market, we found a buyer that I liked. Compatibility was important, because I had intended



on working afterwards for the people who bought the practice. In the middle of contracts, my life took a dramatic turn though and things turned out a little differently.

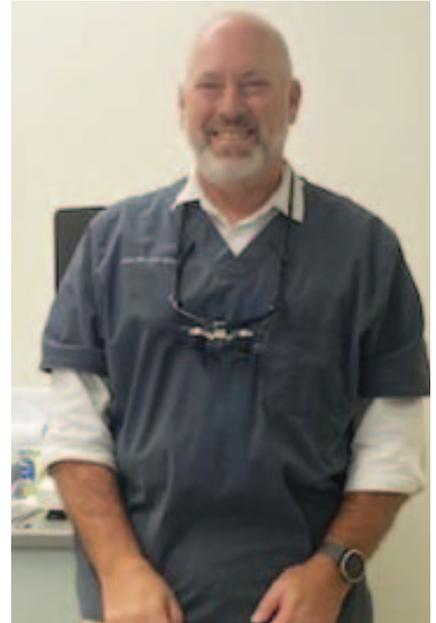
What happened?

I have always been a keen cyclist and triathlete. One Sunday morning, I was on my regular bike route and a driver tried to merge onto the road, went through a give-way sign and t-boned me. I don't remember a lot about the accident, but I'm told that I ended up in the middle of the traffic. I was very lucky as an eyewitness ran out and stopped the traffic from coming towards me.

I was in hospital for a week and a half. I had a shattered collarbone, my 1st down to 9th ribs were fractured, a punctured lung, bruising on my liver, a few internal bleeds and cuts and scratches. I was pretty much immobile. They left my ribs to heal, fixed my collarbone with a bar and pins, and managed to reinflate my pneumothorax. I couldn't sleep on my back, so I had to hire a hospital bed for home use... and that was it for me.

Rehab started at around the 3-month mark. It was fairly limited by the amount of pain I could tolerate. I had a frozen shoulder, I couldn't lay on my back or front. Everything was difficult.

I wasn't able to do any clinical work for



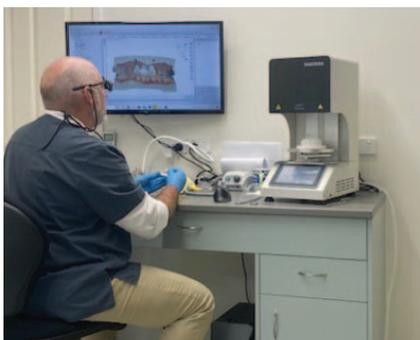
6-8 months. The staff and my associate at the time were amazing, but if I hadn't had sold at the time I did, the practice's value would have plummeted and I don't think I wouldn't have been able to sell at all.

I was lucky that the buyers still wanted to proceed with the deal. I guess it's a testament to the strength of the practice, the integrity of the buyers and PSS as a broker.

How are you feeling now? Are you going back to dentistry?

My shoulder movement is starting to improve, but I don't have a lot of rotation in my spine and the ribs have healed a bit out of place.

Stopping the cycling and triathlons has been the most frustrating and disappointing thing for me.





I haven't been able to get back on a bike; I do a bit of walking, but that's about all I can do. I haven't given up the hope of getting back into swimming, but the doctors cannot give me an idea of where I'll get to.

I had a go at practicing dentistry in August last year – I did about 2 days a week, 3 hours a day, for the buyers of my practice. I only lasted about 2 months. I

just couldn't do the quality of work I had previously done because it was causing me a lot of pain. It was very frustrating and I wasn't happy. Every time I worked, I couldn't do anything at all the next day.

What are the plans from here?

I want to stay in the dental field. I converted my woodwork workshop into a dental lab. It's a commercial lab and has

everything I need to work now. I do all the lab work for my old practice and the new owner's 2nd practice. It works out fairly well; I can work without twisting my back or raising my arm; it's a fairly comfortable thing for me to do.

I'm not giving up hope on going back to dentistry – if I can get back to swimming and get my shoulder going, I should be able to do it. Once I have use of my shoulder again – if I can do a 3-5 km run without being in agony, I would consider myself good enough to do a bit of work. At the moment that isn't even vaguely possible.

As for whether I have learnt anything from the experience – I'm sure there would be lots of people who know me who say that I am incapable of learning. That being said, I think it would be:

- ◆ that no matter how much you plan and think through the outcome of decisions, there is always the chance of the unexpected coming along and changing everything – and you have to be adaptable to the change if this occurs.

Also... be nice to your wife and family because they might be nursing you and bringing your pain meds at some stage and it's really good to have them on time! ◆