

What a Prospective Associate Needs to Know About a Practice They are Joining

Obviously, the owner/senior dentist will not be asked all of these questions during the initial associateship interview. However, this is the type of information an associate should ask, and the senior dentist should be prepared to answer as the interviewing process and negotiations proceed before a final associateship contract is signed.

1. Review the main characteristics you are searching for in an associate.
2. Describe your practice:
 - a. Age of practice
 - b. Location(s)
 - c. Number of dentists
 - d. Number of staff
 - e. Distribution of staff Business: Clinical:
 - f. Number of operatories
 - g. Any additional equipment to be added for an associate? Any additional office space needed?
 - h. Number of days/weeks worked
 - i. Office hours
 - j. Plans for expanding hours
 - k. Adequate parking?
 - l. Number of phone lines
 - m. Computer system? Online presence? Paperless office?
 - n. Incorporated?
3. Will the current staff remain employed, and can they support another dentist, or must additional staff be hired?
4. How willing will current staff be to work with a new dentist?
5. Will an additional hygienist have to be hired? Is there an operatory available for him/her or will one be added?
6. Will I as the entering associate absorb patient overflow or be expected to build my own patient base?
7. Will I get to see/treat new patients as well as restorative and recare? If not, do you have a time frame in mind for when I can treat a full scope of patients?
8. What is the approximate number of active patients (seen within the previous two years in general practice, within the last eighteen months in pediatric dental practice)?
9. What is the average number of new patients per month?
10. What is an average number of restorative and recare (hygiene) patients seen monthly?
11. Please review the mix of services offered in the practice. Which services are consistently referred to another office?
12. On average, how many patients per month leave the practice?
13. How often are charts purged?
14. What kind of marketing (education) efforts are being made to build the practice?
15. What is the primary referral source?
16. Describe your recare system.

17. What percentage of the practice is private insurance? Do you wait on insurance assignment?
18. How is insurance processed? What happens to insurance claims that are not paid within four to six weeks?
19. Are collections a problem?
20. What is the collection percentage rate? (Collection percentage rate calculated by dividing collections for a given period by production for the same period.)
21. Do you treat Medicaid (Title XIX)? If so, what percentage? Will the new associate be expected to absorb all Medicaid patients?
22. Do you participate in managed care programs? Describe briefly. What percent of the patients are in managed care?
23. How frequently are fees reviewed?
24. What is the general profile of the patient load? If this is a pediatric dental practice, are there enough young patients to assure the practice has not aged out?
25. How much vacation do you take?
26. How many c.e. courses do you attend yearly?
27. Describe your work pace and schedule.
28. Have you had an associate before? May I ask the circumstances of his/her departure (or buy-in if the associate is a partner).
29. Will there be a large up-front cost outlay for the entering associate?
30. What expenses will the entering associate be expected to pay?
31. Will the associate be salaried or receive a percent of his/her collections? (production?)
32. How long before a buy-in might be offered? Do you want an associate for one year, two years or longer? Would you welcome a buy-in partner following a successful one- or two-year associateship?
33. If a buy-in is to happen in a year or two, how and when will the practice be appraised?
34. How would a buy-in situation be structured?
35. What if the associateship does not work?
36. Will the associate contract include a restrictive covenant? If so, what will be the conditions?
37. What is the general profile of the community? Is it growing?
38. Who are the major employers in the area?
39. What is the general climate of the dental community?
40. Does the local dental society meet regularly? Do you participate?
41. Does your accountant meet with you regularly to plan for the practice?
42. May my advisers and I see the last three years' income and expense statements once our negotiations are in the final stage?
43. What is your time frame for taking an associate?
44. How many more years will you choose to practice?
45. I know I'll need your input and advice as we begin working together. Will we be able to meet regularly?