



Rural Dentists of Ontario: An Endangered Species

I have some bad news to report to the dentists of rural Ontario — you are an endangered species.

We have tried to sell numerous rural practices over the past 10 years. Many could not be sold at any price and our clients were forced to shut the doors, send patients away and sell off the equipment and leaseholds. Years of searching for replacements yielded minimal, if any, interest and left some of the dentists without a penny for their years of hard work.


One would think that the surplus of dentists in major cities, especially the greater Toronto area, and the large debts of today's dental graduates, would drive dentists to these smaller towns and cities, if only for economic reasons. One might think that the lifestyle opportunities and the lower cost of living would attract many a dentist. One would assume that lower overheads, a large patient load and above-average incomes might also be incentives. These benefits alone should be enough to attract today's graduates to these practices. Sadly, this is not the case.

I have witnessed several practices that have been dismantled, and the owner has simply 'walked away'. In other cases the **only** dentist in the town would retire. Nearby dentists would be notified, yet not one would offer to buy the practice, as they themselves were already fully booked, and had no need to purchase their colleague's patient load. The equipment would then be discarded or donated to Third World countries and the staff would subsequently lose their jobs. In one instance, the nearest dentist for a town of over 2,000 persons is now 45 minutes away — and the dentist at this office is fully booked for months in advance.

How then can the dental profession overcome this unfortunate trend? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Lower appraised values for these practices even more. While we have been conservatively appraising rural practices for years, the market dictates that we must lower them even more — a frustrating reality for our company and for our clients.
2. Unite the dentists of rural Ontario and initiate a campaign to recruit dentists to their areas. I know that the Thunder Bay District Dental Society has tried this with some success, but there are currently four dental practices for sale in Thunder Bay, none of which has attracted a buyer in over a year.
3. Consider an incentive program for dental students from rural communities who would, in exchange for some level of financial support during university, agree to return and practise in these underserved locations. Perhaps this is too politically sensitive a topic, but where do today's graduates wish to practise? Unfortunately, rural Ontario does not appear to be the place.

In the future, I predict that the dentists of rural Ontario will follow in the footsteps of their medical colleagues. The normal routine will be to practise until you simply can't manage anymore, shut the doors and then wish the community good luck in finding another dentist.

What a waste. 

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