



The National Dental Board will mean finding dentists faster – Here's why!

By Simon Palmer,

The Australian National Dental Board (NDB) is set to come in July 2010 replacing the old state based registration boards.

This change means that for the first time dentists will be able to work all around Australia without having to re-register each time they cross a state border. The impact this change will have on the industry will be significant. Practices across Australia looking for dentists to work for them will see more candidates applying as interstate dentists are able to respond faster and easier than ever before.

To grasp the scope of this change, and the impact it will have, we first need to look at a few profiles of dentists who currently need to be registered in more than one state at a time and what is involved in these multiple registrations.

Profile 1: Dentists living near the state borders

Example: Let's say you lived in Wodonga, for example, a town on the Victorian side of the NSW/VIC border and you found part time work there as a dentist and saw an advert on DJS's website (www.djs.com.au) for a part time dentist wanted in Albury (A town on the NSW side of the border that is adjacent to Wodonga).

Profile 2: Interstate Locum Work

Example: A dentist living in Sydney with some time off (perhaps between jobs) sees an ad for a locum needed for a week in Port Douglas Queensland. A place the dentist loves to visit as a tourist and wouldn't mind working in for a week.

Profile 3: Interstate Volunteer Dentists

Example: A dentist from Adelaide who wants to volunteer their services at "Filling The Gap" (a dentist volunteer programme working out of Cairns QLD www.fillingthegap.com.au)

Profile 4: Backpacking Dentists

Example: Every year many young dentists from Australia, NZ and the UK backpack around Australia enjoying some time off between studying and settling down (DJS usually has many at any one time) looking to pick up some locum work as they travel.

Profile 5: Interstate migration

Example: A Dentist who for one reason or another are moving across state borders half way through a year

If you fall into any of the above profiles you would need to be registered in more than one state in Australia. This doesn't mean going through the exact same process

twice. Each state dental board operates with their own procedures, requirements and regulations. For example:

- Each state registration board has different registration fees ranging between \$130.00 pa to \$520 pa
- Some states renew registration in January, some in July
- Some states have Continuing Education requirements, some don't
- Some states need you to turn up in person to the dental board, some don't.
- Some states do not provide provisional registration and need the dental board to meet in order for you to become registered. You have to wait for this meeting before obtaining registration.
- Some require an English test if you come from a non English speaking country, some don't.
- Some accept payment by credit card, some don't
- Some require a police check, some don't.
- Some require references, some don't
- Some require a points system of identification, some don't

None of these of course are insurmountable problems for a dentist. However, each of them does represent a small hurdle and when you put them together the size of the hurdle grows.

It is easy to see how the hurdles of individual state dental board registration may discourage:

- a dentist from taking a short-term interstate locum or volunteer position. After all why would you go to the expense and trouble for a few short weeks?
- a backpacking dentist from taking a short-term placement in a regional centre. Especially if short on cash and time.

Even if these hurdles do not stop a dentist in one of the above profiles from working interstate it would – at a minimum – slow down the response time to a requirement.

Regularly in the newspapers it is reported that there are overwhelmed practices and notoriously long waiting times for people wanting to see dentists in regional and remote areas of Australia. So far the industry has been responding to the shortage of dentists in these areas by creating new dental schools and increasing class sizes of the existing ones while the state based dental boards continue making it onerous for dentists to respond quickly to shortages. Every delay in responding to dentist vacancies in regional and remote areas means patients not seen and longer waiting periods.

Hopefully we can look forward to the new National Dental Board making the workforce more effective and efficient. The elimination of needing to re-register every time a state border is crossed, will ultimately result in a more dynamic, more mobile dentist workforce that fills work vacancies faster and results in the servicing of more patients.