



## **Get Moving!**

**By Darren McMurray**

Whether you're a city or a country dental practice, you'll know that there is a large shortage of dentists in rural Australia, that keeps growing. Most of us who work in the dental sector can empathise with the country practices that have had it tough for so many years. The growing shortage of dentists in rural Australia has led to an increasing and overwhelming need for dental services in these communities and there is little relief in sight. Country dentists battle to attract dentists to their practices – whether it is to help them with their patient load or to sell their practices to.

The rural dentists continue to struggle on, not only because it is their livelihood, but because they have a strong sense of commitment to their local communities. Dentists in country communities are sometimes the only provider of an essential service and the community can have depended on their services for two or three generations. Neither the dentist nor the community are likely to take that commitment lightly.

As a result, dentists often develop a much deeper, longer-lasting relationship with their patients in a country practice and the dentist is held in very high esteem by the community that depends on their services. This is something which sets a country practice apart from a city practice.

Rural life will not suit everyone, but those dentists who are willing to give it a try will definitely benefit from the experience in many ways. There is significant career and lifestyle potential:

1. Starting in a new practice and trying to build up a patient base in the city can be a frustrating process, with ebbs and flows in your appointment book. You can't reliably tell how many patients you will see next week or next month, which makes it difficult to meet your financial commitments. The need for dentists in rural communities often means that you can be as busy as you want from day one.
2. High real estate prices in Australian cities mean that many graduates have to put off home ownership until later in life. Rural real estate prices make owning a home possible at an earlier stage in life.
3. Metropolitan jobs are highly sought after, with as many as 20-30 candidates applying for each position. This puts individual candidates in a very poor negotiating position with employers. As a result, the positions are inflexible and on the employer's terms. Rural practices get far fewer candidates for a position and are usually much more open to suggestion. Employers are more willing to be flexible about the remuneration package, available hours, etc.
4. Practice purchase can be much more reasonable.

We have many country employers who would welcome a dentist into their practice on a locum basis to try it out for while, with the understanding that if it doesn't suit, there has been nothing lost. In our experience, city dentists who have gone to country practices to 'test the water' have thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Once they've made the decision to give it a try, most end up staying.

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I was an inner-city dweller for most of my life. My decision to make the sea-change to coastal Victoria was not something I decided overnight. Having enjoyed many weekends on the coast, I was curious about what it was like living there permanently. I spoke with the locals and was amazed at the way they had created wonderful networks of likeminded locals, and most impressively, had discovered the secret to a balanced lifestyle. Country areas these days are full of professional people who have wised-up to the fact that life is short and there needs to be a balance between work and leisure.

Talk to any country dentist and ask them about their social and leisure time. As a result of population growth in most country/regional areas, the locals enjoy all of the same things as city dwellers, and more. The difference is that the country residents often have more disposable income, and more time to use it. Country dentists don't have to deal with traffic or public transport hassles to get to or from work, which we all know can add a couple of hours of stress to your day. They can enjoy a stroll on the beach or a brisk walk along a country road, taking in the scenery, before they head in to work for the day – often that walk is part of their route to work. Lunchtimes can mean actually getting out of the office, enjoying lunch at a local café where everyone knows your name... Imagine finishing work for the day, zipping home without any traffic, and being on the beach with your family for a picnic dinner only moments later.

These days, with so many inexpensive and regular flights in and out of most rural areas, there is no need to fear isolation from friends and family who may still living in the cities. It's only a quick flight into the city to attend all those important family functions, or to enjoy a night out with friends.

Here at DJS, with one office in Sydney and another in Ocean Grove Victoria (a coastal town, 30 min south of Geelong), we know first-hand the reality of rural/coastal vs city life. Those of us in the Ocean Grove office often walk, fish and/or swim at the beach before and after work in the summer. And it seems when we talk to other locals, they are all doing the same thing. On the weekends we eat at local restaurants which use fresh local produce; we visit wineries and dine overlooking vineyards and rolling hills, shop at boutique stores in nearby towns, and get to show off our lifestyle to visiting friends who still live in the city.

If, for some reason, we feel the city beckoning, it's not that much effort to venture back there for the day, or stay for the weekend. I never thought I would say it, but these days I rarely head back to the city...why would I need to?

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