Gentle Dental Partners
'You Should Love Your Dentist'
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‘You Should Love Your Dentist’
By Lilliana Elben

Dr. Robert Kelleher owned and operated his own solo dental practice in Dedham, MA, for 23 years. The income was good, he was successful and he was his own boss. He recalls, “A member of my staff actually came up to me one day and said that I’d been looking stressed for a long time.” He laughs now. “I knew it was time to make a change.” He sold his practice and took over a multispecialty group practice in Stoughton.

Dr. Stephanie Payne loves her practice in Malden. She is able to work flexible hours to accommodate her young family and she likes being part of a practice that has specialists on staff.

Dr. Robert Girschek appreciates working with other caring dentists; dentists who believe in delivering the same high level of dental care that he provides. Dr. Girschek considers himself lucky to have all of that in his Main Street practice in Waltham.

When he graduated from Boston University’s Goldman School of Dental Medicine, Dr. Jonathan Millen’s goal was to establish himself as a general dentist in a city or metropolitan area. Today, Dr. Millen has accomplished that in a thriving Back Bay practice.

Aside from professional satisfaction, lucrative incomes and relatively stress-free professional lifestyles, these dentists have one other thing in common.

All four are Gentle Dental partners.

Dr. Stephanie Payne began working for Dr. Ron Weissman, a prosthodontist, at the Brookline Gentle Dental office as part of Boston University’s APEX program, and was not only impressed with the practice, but also with the way the entire Gentle Dental

As most solo practitioners know only too well, nearly a quarter of their time is consumed with administrative tasks. Dealing with insurance, government regulations, hiring, reviewing, firing and bookkeeping — the everyday nonclinical management of a practice — keep most dentists from doing what they enjoy the most: practicing dentistry.
Both, along with Dr. Robert Girschek and Dr. Bob Kelleher, are now Clinical Practice Directors and equity-invested partners in the Gentle Dental practices, and each enjoys the financial benefits from the partnership.

For Drs. Millen, Payne, Girschek and Kelleher — and over 100 other Massachusetts dentists, 30 of whom have partnership equity — Gentle Dental has provided them with a satisfying professional life, an income equal to or better than what they could make in their own practice, and a more rewarding relationship with their team members and patients. Most importantly, though, it's removed perhaps one of the most negative aspects of solo practice dentistry — the nonclinical headaches.

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"When I attended dental school," notes Dr. Kelleher, "the clinical training was excellent, but no one told us anything about practice management. When I had my own practice, it was the practice

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**Gentle Dental Partners and Directors**

**Dr. Jay Pivor**
Arlington

**Dr. Joe Capua**
South Attleboro

**Dr. Raffi Bagdassarian**
Belmont

**Dr. Jeff Malmquist**
Beverly

**Dr. Richard Rothstein**
Dr. Jonathan Millen
Newbury Street, Boston

**Dr. Alex Smolyar**
Tremont Street, Boston

**Dr. Katharine Murphy**
South Boston

**Dr. Rami Jraddeh**
Braintree

**Dr. Paul Rayev**
Brighton

**Dr. Dennis Pezzolesi**
Brookline

**Dr. Mohammad Golparvar**
Burlington

**Dr. Lane Vandyck**
Cambridge

**Dr. Leena Desai**
Chelmsford

**Dr. Farshad Pezeshki**
Jamaica Plain

**Dr. Stephanie Payne**
Malden

**Dr. Mythili Prakash**
Methuen

**Dr. Scott Fitzgerald**
Natick

**Dr. Matt Giammarco**
Peabody

**Dr. Jan Sapak**
Quincy

**Dr. Robert Kelleher**
Stoughton

**Dr. Sigal Revah**
Wakefield

**Dr. Robert Girschek**
Waltham

**Dr. Jack Rozanski**
West Roxbury

**Dr. Tina Arora-Mohan**
Worcester

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**Specialists Partners**

**Dr. David Goldberg**
Periodontics

**Dr. Donald Richard**
Oral Surgery

**Dr. Tim Lim**
Orthodontics

**Dr. Natalia Hoffman**
Orthodontics
management tedium that burned me out. Keeping abreast of all the new insurance options — managed care, PPO and the various plans within each insurance company — was time consuming and confusing. Ultimately, it created a need for more staff — and that was another headache. I found myself enjoying dentistry less and less.

Although Gentle Dental is best recognized by the public and the profession for its advertising, that is only a small part of the service they provide to their practices. At Gentle Dental, the burden of human resources, marketing, equipment and technology maintenance and other administrative work is a function of the management company, leaving the dentists to concentrate on patient care. "Because Gentle Dental provides its offices with such tremendous resources," says Dr. Girschek, "as a director, I don't have to worry about any of those things."

Marketing can't be downplayed, as it has become mainstream in dentistry. The ADA recently partnered with the marketing group Intelligent Dental Marketing, which advocates branding identity and external marketing. The additional costs to implement this into a solo practice can be prohibitive. By combining the marketing budgets of 24 practices, Gentle Dental has the resources to have a significant presence on TV, radio and in print. As a result, accumulated marketing over the last 25 years has given Gentle Dental the best name recognition among dental practices in Massachusetts.

Dr. Sam Shames and Dr. Ron Weissman founded the multispecialty group practice in the early 1980s. Gentle Dental essentially began, as so many success stories do, with a good idea.

For Dr. Weissman, a pioneer in the concept of dental advertising and practice marketing, the light bulb came on with the 1977 Supreme Court decision that ruled that bans on professional advertising restrained trade, inhibited freedom of speech and was not in the best interests of the public.

For Dr. Shames, it was the growing realization that a multispecialty practice not only allowed for better communication between dental professionals and their patients, but better and more efficient care overall. Patients who required specialty services would frequently ask him, "Can't you do it here?" So, why not build a practice that accommodates the patient?

"Dentists who work in groups seem to take more pride in their work because they know colleagues may see their cases in the lab or for emergencies," says Dr. Shames. "There is built-in quality control in groups because dentists want to demonstrate their abilities to their colleagues."

Dr. Kelleher believes. Finding the opportunity to work with so many specialists under one roof is a real boon. "I felt so isolated when I had a solo practice," he admits. "That's not the case anymore, and I love the change."

"Marketing has become mainstream in dentistry. The ADA now endorses branding, identity and advertising" — Dr. Ron Weissman

"If you focus on your product, excellent dentistry and patient care, the money will come. If you focus on the dollar, you probably won't be around very long." — Dr. Sam Shames
Dr. Girshek feels the traditional solo practice model is dying. “Solo practices typically refer out specialty work,” he says. “For the patient, this slows treatment and opens the window for miscommunication. At Gentle Dental,” he continues, “our treatment plans are much better because of the constant interaction and the communication between our dentists and specialists. For both patients and dentists, it’s a win-win situation.

“Due to the multispecialty concept in all Gentle Dental facilities,” Dr. Girshek says, “I work every day with doctors whose skills are different from my own. There’s a sense of security knowing there’s always someone there to help me if I need it.”

The final piece of the puzzle was to solve the absentee management problem that had plagued many groups in the past. The solution was to put a partner in each practice and let them share the profits.

While other multispecialty group practice models have come and gone, Gentle Dental continues to thrive. Since 1981, 24 Gentle Dental practices have been established throughout Eastern Massachusetts, and there are future plans for more. I asked Dr. Shames why he thinks Gentle Dental continues to prosper while other group dental practices have failed.

“Gentle Dental is different,” he notes. “There have been many attempts to establish successful groups, but they always seemed to disappear, primarily because of absentee management and a focus on the dollar instead of on patient retention and excellent dental care.

“It’s really quite simple,” he explains. “At Gentle Dental, we’re owned and run by dentists and driven by the desire to practice the best possible dentistry.”

Four years after Dr. Payne joined Gentle Dental’s Malden office, the existing director, Dr. Matt Giamarco, relocated to the new Gentle Dental location in Peabody. At that point, Dr. Payne seized the opportunity to become Malden’s Practice Director and make the leap from dental associate to Director and invested partner.

“I knew I wanted to become a director,” she says. “I wanted to be able to run my own practice, and I knew I could become more financially stable as an invested partner. As a working mother, the appeal of a director’s more flexible hours is a real plus. It’s also given me the opportunity to mentor my associates and concentrate on my dentistry. I must be doing something right,” she laughs. “Three

“I’m practicing dentistry the way I believe it should be practiced. As a director, I manage the activities of my own practice, satisfying the need to have autonomy. As part of the Gentle Dental system, I have many resources at my disposal. That’s a reassuring feeling.” — Dr. Jonathan Millen
Dr. Sam Shames, Dr. Jonathan Millen, Dr. Alex Smolyar
of my associates have left to become Gentle Dental Directors themselves, and my husband, Dr. Joseph Capua, is director of the Attleboro Gentle Dental office!"

This is precisely the way Gentle Dental wants to grow — by "seeding" new practices with successful associates. This ensures continued growth and an opportunity for associates. This model also allows young practice directors to acquire the expanding equity from both new-practice growth and existing practice growth.

"Financially, you're as successful as you believe you can be," says Dr. Millen. Adds Dr. Kelleher, "Besides a very good income practicing dentistry, I'm an equity partner, sharing in the financial growth of the company."

Dr. Shames is also a big believer in continuing education. He has developed an accredited continuing education sponsorship with the AGD. Gentle Dental has been sponsoring courses for Gentle Dental doctors for over 15 years. "It's a real convenience that we can award CE credits to our dentists as well as offer them the education," he says.

Gentle Dental believes in giving back to

Right: Over the years, Gentle Dental has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to various charities. Volunteerism is encouraged for all offices and doctors.

Below: "I wanted to become a director to be able to run my own practice. I also knew I could become more financially stable as an invested partner. As a working mother, the appeal of a director's flexible hours is a real plus."

— Dr. Stephanie Payne

Gentle Dental partners Dr. Joe Capua, Dr. Stephanie Payne and their children, Steven and Dylan

both the community and the profession. All partners are required to belong to the ADA and MDS. Volunteerism is encouraged, with many Gentle Dental doctors volunteering time to teach at dental schools. The practices and doctors are proud that Gentle Dental has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years to causes such as Katrina relief, tsunami relief, the families of 9/11 firefighters and police, Boston Floating Hospital, and both Tufts and Boston University dental schools, as well as annual dental society outreach projects and many other deserving charities.

Dr. Shames is both honored and proud that his experience and expertise in practice management has been recognized by Tufts Dental School. This year, he has been made the Director of Practice Management for Tufts University School of Dental Medicine.

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