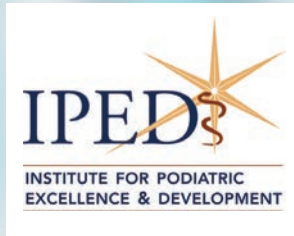


Solo Practice Remains a Viable Option for Some

Yes, it is still possible to open your own practice.

BY P. DAVID APPLGATE, DPM



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Opportunity Knocks is provided by the Institute of Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). They encourage you to visit www.podiatricexcellence.org to find or post job listings, resumes, or fellowships for podiatry.

There's no debating that multi-directional change is afoot in medicine. Practice surveys show a progression towards employment with larger hospital-based systems. Droves of practitioners are hanging up their shingles and attempting to find greener waters with larger organizations. With all of the negative press, it's no wonder that there are few reports of people hanging their shingle directly out of, or a few years

after, residency graduation. All's not lost, however, as private practice as a physician-owner remains a viable practice option for many. Though the statistics in regards to hospital-based

practice environment you'd like to work in? Have you considered opening up your own practice? Now's the time to start thinking about your future. With a proper work ethic and moti-

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employment certainly do not lie, there are a number of people who continue to open practices directly out of residency annually, and many of them thrive.

Are you about to graduate? Do you have any idea what type of prac-

tion, opening up a practice is not much more than a lengthy to-do list. For the right type of person, opening a practice is entirely feasible... more so than many realize.

For those of you just beginning
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or soon to begin residency training, make a plan to spend the first two years of residency deciding what you want to do, with a plan of making a decision by July 1st of your third year. This applies to all means of employment. Once your decision is made, all that is left to do is formulate a plan and execute it. But how do you go about making that decision?

There is no need to re-invent the wheel to open your practice.

For those already interested in running a business, going into practice on one's own is a straightforward decision. For those who are not yet in tune with their desires, the decision can be more difficult. From hiring, managing, and dismissing staff, to keeping track of practice finances and material inventory, the non-clinical aspects of a medical practice differ from the education many DPMs receive in podiatric medical school and residency. Thankfully, however, all of these skills can be learned in time if an interest is there. Spend time re-

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searching and weighing out various options. Seek out mentors. Attend relevant national conferences. Read books, as there are hundreds of titles that have been written on the topic. In the end, you will be able to make an informed decision.

Assuming you've decided to open your own practice, once your third year of residency rolls around, it's time to get to work. Start the process by forming a network of close mentors and advisors. Seek out attending physicians who operate practices in a way that you see yourself operating a practice and ask them to mentor you. Sit them down and ask questions. Take the time to meet their office managers and staff and ask them questions as well.

It has been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and so long as you are not planning on opening up a practice in close geographic proximity to your mentors, you'll find that there is no need to re-invent the wheel in order to hang up your shingle. Indeed, you can run a highly successful practice merely by copying other successful practices. The lack of truly direct competition between medical practices that are spaced apart from each other is one of the unique advantages of opening a medical practice. If someone in New Jersey runs a successful practice and is willing to give you

Some of the best advice for those looking to succeed in opening a practice is that without a plan, you plan to fail.

insight on running your own in another state, take the practitioner up on it.

You've likely heard the adage "location, location, location" in reference to real estate many times before. The same statement holds true in practice. Practice location is arguably the single most important decision in setting up a medical practice. Though at the end of the day this is largely a personal decision based on a multitude of factors, an easy way to evaluate a geographic locale's need for podiatric care is to determine the ratio of podiatrists to the population. The ideal ratio is 1:25,000, or one podiatrist for every 25,000 people. Choose a five to ten-mile radius around a location, and figure out how many podiatrists practice within that radius. Be aware of part-time clinics in your area, as a podiatrist who sees patients for a half-day twice a week is not necessarily a full competitor for the sake of calculation. From there, you need to figure out how many people live within the chosen radius of your intended practice location. A helpful method of doing this is using commercial real estate listings, which are freely available online and commonly list population quantities within five or ten miles of a location.

Some of the best advice for those looking to succeed

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in opening a practice is that without a plan, you plan to fail. The same holds true in all types of business. The cornerstone of your plan is your business plan, your next step. A quick search of the web will provide you with hundreds of articles on how to write a proper plan, and a quick stop at your local book store will have the same effect. Take your time writing the business plan, and do not be afraid to make it lengthy. A key component of all business plans are financial projections, which can be made with the aid of the practice mentors who were discussed previously. You can pen your business plan in any word processing software suite, but may find cloud-based software such as LivePlan.com beneficial, as it allows you to not only make financial projections, but weave them seamlessly into your business plan.

Once your business plan is in place, it's time to secure financial backing. The options for financial backing are limitless, but most opt to secure financing from a local banking or credit union. Make a list of banks in the geographic area around where you're looking to practice, and ask to sit down and speak with someone about medical practice financing. Remember the bit about financial projections above? That's how you know how much

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you're going to need to ask for. Expect this number to be around \$250,000, though this number is ballpark and numbers certainly do vary by geographic locale and desired practice set-up.

Once you've secured financing, it's time to start looking for a clinic. Though you can certainly drive around and call the number on the sign outside of properties that are available, commercial real estate brokers are worth their weight in gold when it comes to securing a clinic in a fair and equitable manner. Make sure to get one before you start the process. The decision to build out a location versus going into a ready-made space is a personal one, so consult your team of mentors and advisors during the process.

Opening up a medical practice is not an impossible venture for those who have adequately equipped themselves for the process.

From here, the process is variable and dependent on what you've set out to do in your particular instance. You'll want to get a good lawyer to help you form an entity with the state and advise you on various other legal matters. You'll want to make sure that you get your state license to practice podiatry in a timely manner as well. Malpractice insurance will be needed, as will a host of other types of insurances. Most important of all, you'll need to get on insurance plans so you can accept insurance when you see patients. This may all seem a bit overwhelming, but if you've made it this far, it won't seem that way, as you'll be used to the grind of making decisions as you make your way through executing your business plan. As previously mentioned, consult your mentors, advisors, and books, which you've become very familiar with by now.

Sometime after you graduate residency, it'll be time to begin seeing patients. Congratulations—you made it. That wasn't all that bad, was it? Though intended more as a means of stimulating thought than as a guide for opening a medical practice, this article hopefully proved useful to you. Though it does require a lot of upfront effort, opening up a medical

practice is not an impossible venture for those who have adequately equipped themselves for the process. Take the time to inform yourself as to all of your options, form a plan, then execute it. **PM**



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