Owner or employee? The practice ownership intentions of pediatric dentistry residents

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Findings

• More than 60% were extremely or very interested in practice ownership.
• Half anticipated becoming an owner within 5 years of graduation from residency.
• Inverse relationship seen between level of comfort in assuming a business loan to acquire a dental practice and an educational debt burden of $400,000 or greater (P = 0.002).
• Those citing educational debt as a primary concern or consideration pertaining to practice ownership were more than twice as likely to report having student loans totaling $400,000 or more (P < 0.001).
• Male residents were over 40% more likely to report being extremely or very interested in practice ownership than were their female counterparts (P = 0.001).
• Half believed it is significantly more challenging to manage a dental practice today compared to 20 years ago.
• Those feeling completely, very, or moderately prepared to manage the operations of a dental practice were over 40% more likely to be extremely or very interested in practice ownership than were those who felt slightly or not at all prepared to do so (P < 0.001).

Background

Between 2005 and 2019 the percentage of all dentists in private practice who were practice owners declined from 84.7% to 76.1%, while the decline for dentists under the age of 35 was from 49.0% to 30.7%. From 1990 to 2017, educational debt for graduating dental students increased 233% when adjusted for inflation. Similarly, between 1996 and 2010, the debt-to-income ratio for dental school graduates increased from approximately 0.70 to 0.97. The primary objectives of this study were to investigate the interest in practice ownership among pediatric dentistry residents and the factors influencing their practice ownership intentions, particularly educational debt.

Methods

In the spring of 2020, an invitation to participate in an anonymous web-based survey was sent to 933 pediatric dentistry residents training in the United States. The response rate was 32.9%. The survey inquired about demographic information, level of interest in practice ownership and anticipated time to becoming a practice owner, prior practice experience and future practice plans, and factors influencing career decisions.

References