



Dentists and Dental Therapists in Private Practice: Two case studies

Main Street Dental Care, Montevideo, MN

In January 2012, Dr. John Powers of Main Street Dental Care in Montevideo, MN, became the first private practice dentist in the United States to employ a dental therapist, whom he hired with the goal of increasing his practice's capacity to treat more low-income patients in a financially sustainable way.* After 11 months with a dental therapist working part time, Dr. Powers' practice saw the following increases:

- Share of Medicaid patients up from 26 percent to 39 percent.
- New patients up by 38 percent.
- Profits up by \$23,831.†

In addition, Dr. Powers has gained more flexibility in his schedule, allowing him to focus on more advanced procedures.‡

* The dental therapist in Dr. Powers' practice worked three days per week in 2012. The next year she worked four days per week.

† Before accounting for the cost of employing a dental therapist, collections increased by \$114,502.

‡ Includes 40 percent more root canals, 23 percent more surgical extractions, 46 percent more dental implants, and 58 percent more removable prosthodontics (dentures), as well as 45 percent fewer fillings (composite restorations).

Battlefords Dental Group, North Battleford, Saskatchewan

Canada's dental care delivery system is not part of its national health care system. Like Americans, Canadians must obtain private dental coverage or pay out-of-pocket. Government dental coverage is, however, provided to indigenous citizens and some low-income individuals.

In North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Dr. Lornce Harder has employed a dental therapist since 1980. In 2009, he hired a second dental therapist. In this practice, dental therapists are paid on commission, much like the business model that many U.S. dentists use when employing associate dentists. According to the practice's estimates, 12 percent of the patients it sees are indigenous citizens of Canada.

Dental therapists at the practice accounted for:

- CA\$529,035 in combined collections.*
- CA\$216,987 in profit after adjusting for commissions and overhead.†

Because the dental therapists provided the majority of the routine preventive and restorative care such as fillings and treated all of the children in the practice, Dr. Harder had the flexibility to focus his work on adults and on performing more advanced procedures.

* As of Jan. 15, 2014, one Canadian dollar equaled US\$0.91 according to Bloomberg. (Source: <http://www.bloomberg.com/quote/CADUSD:CUR>.)

† Combined commissions paid to dental therapists in 2012 came to CA\$192,032. Other overhead—utilities, supplies, time of dental assistants—were estimated at CA\$120,016.

For further information, please visit:

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