

Dr. Julianne Proniuk – What is it like to be an associate in a dental practice?

Dr. O'Keefe: Today I'm speaking with Dr. Julianne Proniuk, she's currently an associate in a dental practice, a single practice, in the greater Toronto area and I want to find out what's it like to be an associate, from Julianne. But Julianne, first just give us a little bit of a background, your professional trajectory to date.

Dr. Proniuk: Sure. So, I did my dental schooling out at UBC and graduated in 2015 and then when I started working, I actually worked in Red Deer, Alberta for two years and I was an associate dentist there, kind of a mom and pop shop. So, I was an associate and the owner was there probably about half the time that I was there. So, I was in Red Deer for two years and then I moved back to Toronto, which is where I'm from, and I've been working at Peel Village Dental in Brampton, Ontario from 2017 to now.

Dr. O'Keefe: Is the principal of the practice in the same premises as you? Full-time, part-time?

Dr. Proniuk: No. No, he's not. So, he owns a clinic that's five minutes down the road from my office and then we just work complimentary hours.

Dr. O'Keefe: And have you, and maybe you're not in a position to talk about it at this stage, have you thought about where you might like to be in five, 10 years' time?

Dr. Proniuk: Five or 10 years—I actually really like the area and the type of dentistry in the area that I'm doing—so I'd like if everything pans out, to be local, be there still.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, what attracted you to do an associateship? And you've done two of them now and you characterize them one is mom and pop and the other one is a single principal, so smaller type of practices. What attracted you to get into a traditional associateship position?

Dr. Proniuk: Yeah. Well, to be honest with you, when I was choosing my career through university and high school even, that was the model of dentistry that I was used to or that I was accustomed to seeing and so that's kind of how I thought dentistry was practiced. And that's what I liked about it! Just because it was a small business, get to know the patients, the staff, etc., etc. So, I always kind of imagined myself in one of those types of offices when I started working. And then, you know, I found it was a bit more common when I graduated, when I was looking around at different associate positions, I was seeing a lot more of that type of model that was available or associateships that were available. But it's nice because as an associate, and especially as a new grad, you're able to focus exclusively on dentistry rather than numbers, or the business, etc., etc. So, for a couple of reasons there.

- Dr. O'Keefe: Was it particularly daunting for you to, in your very first associateship, to be pretty well on your own in the building half the time?
- Dr. Proniuk: Yeah, it was. It definitely was. I mean, it's different personalities. Some people really thrive in that type of setting and you know, we all have to train and you're all like more than capable of handling it. But what I really liked about with my first associateship was my bosses. My principals were amazing mentors. So, even though I was alone, I could call them if I needed to, etc., etc.
- Dr. O'Keefe: What's a typical work day for you look like? What are you involved in? And just how do you structure your day?
- Dr. Proniuk: Alright. So, at this office I try and get there a little bit earlier, say like 20 minutes early before my first patient just to kind of familiarize myself with the day. Who's coming in? What the hygiene columns look like? Try and get an idea of how I'm going to be running around to see everyone. And then what I'm involved with, and again as an associate it's just my column/my procedures, so I do quite a mix of procedures, predominantly restorative, but there's a mix of, you know, crown and bridge, root canals or endo and extractions too. So yeah, it's just go, go, go most of the time doing my thing and then running over to hygiene to do recall exams or new patient exams, and back and forth.
- Dr. O'Keefe: And do you get to see new patients in your associateship role?
- Dr. Proniuk: Yes, I do. I do. So, I'm the only dentist that's in this office so all new patients I get to see.
- Dr. O'Keefe: What do you like best about being an associate?
- Dr. Proniuk: I would say the best, and this might not be necessarily the case for all associate positions, but the ones that I have had is that I've had a lot of autonomy, but I've also had the opportunity to have mentorship, but nobody's ever stepped on my toes. It's been a wonderful balance between the two. So, I really liked that. Professionally, I think that's allowed me to sort of hone my craft. But I also really like being in a smaller dental office, being able to get to know the patients. And I think that's the best part. Families, you know, even being there for two years now, just seeing the kids, the parents, the neighbors, it's kind of cool that way. And again, I alluded to this a little bit earlier, but you know, I'm not the business owner, so I get to focus on just dentistry and caring for the patients. So that's really where my values are.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Have you had any pearls of advice or wisdom to pass on to dental students coming towards graduation, how to approach finding and getting the right associateship for them?

Dr. Proniuk: Yeah, I remember after writing the boards and thinking, oh no, now I need to find a job. I was just so tired. But you know, one thing I did, I ended up working out in rural Alberta without really knowing anyone there and I would encourage new grads to consider working rurally. Just because you get to practice, generally speaking of course, a wide scope of dentistry just because there aren't as many specialists out there and you really get to find what you like doing and what you're really good at that way. And I would also suggest, you know, once you find that kind of own it and start taking continuing ed and that's your skill set so then you're able to kind of move wherever you would like to. Looking for clinics anyways, I can't encourage enough to find a principal that's going to offer mentorship as well.

Dr. Proniuk: It's really, really valuable. Not only in, say, how to do things clinically because school dentistry is different, everyone knows that, but also just in terms of patient interactions and just getting an idea for how real-life dentistry is done.

Dr. O'Keefe: The non-clinical aspects and...

Dr. Proniuk: Yeah. Exactly.

Dr. O'Keefe: Person management is a huge, huge...

Dr. Proniuk: Yeah, and you can't, you don't really get that taught in school, right? I found a lot of patients that were coming to UBC didn't have huge dental anxiety. They knew they were coming to a student clinic for whatever reasons that they were. But then in the real world, for example, dental anxiety or dental phobia is huge. And so, learning to deal with that, I had great mentors and now it's not a problem and you don't really get that experience without being out there.

Dr. O'Keefe: How do you choose the CE that you are going to take?

Dr. Proniuk: So, when I first started taking it, I was asking a lot of my old classmates what they had been doing, you know, being part of the AGD you're able to see courses through that. I'm not a member, but I can see what courses are available and I know that they're very well done and recognized in many different provinces. So, it's about kind of finding the associations for your local area, your province, and then these big ones like the AGD and just finding courses there. You know, if you like surgery, there's tons of those, or you want to work a little bit on endo, tons of courses for that to.

Dr. O'Keefe: Any final word of advice for a young person embarking on a career and not knowing where to go?

Dr. Proniuk: I would say that I was lucky with my choices or my clinics that I ended up with, but a lot of my classmates, you know, the shoe didn't fit at first, and not to be

too discouraged by that. You know, you learn a lot from being in a place that maybe doesn't work for you. You see how the business is run and maybe you don't identify with that or your philosophies are a little bit different, but there are a number of positions, so keep looking around.

Dr. O'Keefe: Fit is very important.

Dr. Proniuk: Yes. Huge, huge.

Dr. O'Keefe: Dr. Proniuk, thank you very much for your time today.

Dr. Proniuk: No problem. No problem, John.