

## **Dr. Becky Antel – My Experience in a traditional associateship**

- Dr. O'Keefe: So, today I welcome Dr. Becky Antel. She's a general dentist in Edmonton, Alberta, and she's working as an associate in a practice in that city. Becky, just give us a little history of your professional career to date.
- Dr. Antel: All right. So, I graduated in 2013 in Manitoba and associated there for two years before moving out to Edmonton. When I first moved to Edmonton, I spent a year about a year and a half as an associate with the dental corporation and have since moved to a smaller practice. And I've been there for about two and a half years in that associate position.
- Dr. O'Keefe: For the purpose of this project, we're characterizing the type of associateship you're in now as associateship in a traditional practice or a traditional associateship. What attracted you to your current type of associateship?
- Dr. Antel: When I first graduated, I wanted to focus on being a dentist first and not having to worry about the business side of the practice, the payroll, staffing issues, etc. For new grads, I think associating is a great way to gain mentorship and go practice the business end of dentistry, finding the right mentor is very important.
- Dr. O'Keefe: Based on your experiences in different types of associateships, have you got any pros and cons that you'd be willing to share with us about different types of associateship locations?
- Dr. Antel: The key is is finding a position or somewhere where as much as you're learning the business side, you still have input into that. Try things out, see what works, what doesn't work. And it's a good place to, yeah, I mean you don't want to affect the business you're in, but it's a good place to try things out and learn from someone who's been there before. You also wanna make sure you find somewhere that you're going to get that walk-up traffic. And it's not all about advertising all the time, but that those walk-ins and emergencies,
- Dr. O'Keefe: What your typical work day look like?
- Dr. Antel: So early on when I started associating, my days were not fully booked. So, I found that, you know, in my experience it's taken about a year and a half to two years to build a steady patient flow. I would stay all day whether patients were booked or not booked. And you know, this was an opportunity if I didn't have a patient to shadow the owner dentist, read journals, go online CE, just kind of mull about the office and see exactly how a dental practice is run. And even when no patients were booked, I would find that my day would fill with walk-in emergencies. Many of these patients become permanent patients of mine and if I wasn't there when they needed me or they had pain, they would just go see

someone else; they'd see another dentist, go to another practice. So, from this I was able to build up to now more busy days. I'm now working, I've got two chairs, one that I keep for emergencies, walk-ins; and one for scheduled appointments as well as the hygiene chair. So, in the middle of all those patients, finding time to walk over to a hygienist's room and do her recall exams.

Dr. O'Keefe: Do you have much of a say in the equipment or the systems that you use and the specialists that you refer to?

Dr. Antel: Exactly, yeah. So, one of the big benefits of where I'm associating right now is I come in, I do my work, no one standing over telling me, you know, do this, do that, do these many, you know, I can refer to whoever I want, I can pick my materials. Oftentimes if it's material that everyone else is going to be using in the practice, then the owner dentists will chip in and pay. If it's something that I'm going to be using myself, oftentimes they'll have me, you know, at first, I buy it for myself, but when we see how much it's being used and it can be converted to the office covering it.

Dr. O'Keefe: Fair enough. So, there's a certain amount of flexibility in your arrangement and that's clearly advantageous from your perspective.

Dr. Antel: Absolutely. Absolutely. There are still those bonuses of, you know, being an honor without having the responsibility, your after hours work of being an owner.

Dr. O'Keefe: What do you like best about being an associate in your current position?

Dr. Antel: So, one of the nice things is that as I just touched on, I don't have to deal with hiring and firing staff or supplies and materials and when the day is done, the day is done. I go home, I don't worry about paperwork and payroll and I can just spend the time with, you know, the evenings, weekends with my family. When I take vacations, I don't have to worry about, again, overhead paying staff, what's going on in the office. And it really allows for me an excellent work-life balance.

Dr. O'Keefe: Now, you have worked in different types of associateships in different locations. So, I'll bet you'd have some pretty good advice to give to our younger colleagues who may be starting on that journey. Any pearls of advice to share with senior students or people looking for their first associateship? How to go about it?

Dr. Antel: Well, I've got a few there. First of all, be picky. Take time finding the right position for you. Find an owner dentist that you get along with well that will give you good mentorship and similar practice philosophies too. And if it turns out not to be a good fit, find something new. Good mentorship and a good influence, right out of school will set you up to love dentistry, decrease your

stress through practicing. And don't settle. Don't worry. If you find something that you know, it's not the right fit. There's a lot that you can learn from that. And a lot that you can take with you through your career. Whether it means you know, whether you're associating for the rest of your career or eventually owning your practice. Don't expect the owner of your practice to give you patients and make you busy.

Dr. Antel: That's your responsibility. As I touched on earlier in the conversation, even if you're not booked, come in. There's gonna be some quiet days, sometimes, maybe lonely days. But if you're there, your practice will grow. If you're not there, those patients just go elsewhere. And if you can see a patient when they're in need, when they are pain, that's a patient for life. And then finally, work-life balance is really important as well. So, it's a common misconception that as an associate you don't get to take vacation when you want or you have to work with are considered bad hours. Evenings and weekends, this is not the case in all associate positions. You may need to find the one that gives you that freedom and that work-life balance you want. But also remembering that when you're first starting out, working evenings and weekends can be a great way to build your practice. People nowadays are busy. It's difficult to take time off work to the dentist. So, these evening and weekend appointments can be very lucrative.

Dr. O'Keefe: One other question. Are there any particular considerations to be taken into account for a female looking for an associateship as opposed to a male looking for an associateship?

Dr. Antel: Absolutely. I think that, you know, a lot of females graduating from dental school want to build a practice and work as a dentist, but also want to start a family. And that's something that I personally have been dealing with lately. I just started a family earlier this year. And so, when I was looking for my associate position, I wanted to make sure that in the summer, they would work with me in terms of that maybe don't want to take time off to have a baby or, you know, sort of hours when I come back. And you need to find someone that's going to work with you. And give those expectations up front. You don't want to go into something, you know, and then find out three years down the road, they're not going to be accommodating of your plans to start a family.

Dr. O'Keefe: Being up front is very, very important and not being afraid to speak for yourself when you were seeking an associateship.

Dr. Antel: Absolutely be honest with what you want because you wanna make sure again, you're going into the right place and once you get settled somewhere and, you start building that practice, it can be hard to move. So, you know, you're honest upfront and they're honest with you up front.



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Dr. O'Keefe: And another thing I picked up from you is be there and be patient. It's important. Nothing is just going to land on your lap. You have to think it through and be ready to play the long game.

Dr. Antel: Absolutely, absolutely. Think exactly that. Think the future. Think down the road and it's worth it. It's absolutely worth it.

Dr. O'Keefe: Becky, thanks for taking time today and sharing your experiences about traditional associateships.

Dr. Antel: Thank you, John, for having me.