

Making your own luck

Gavin Barry discusses opening Clover Dental, the transition from associate to practice owner, and seizing control in challenging times

Amidst the pandemic restrictions of 2020, the dental practice sales market experienced a deceleration primarily due to global economic uncertainty. The conflict in Ukraine and the rising cost of living further exacerbated the downturn. However, there has recently been a noticeable increase in activity.

One significant catalyst has been the period of reflection and re-evaluation that dentists were afforded during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a significant transformation within the dental practice market. Interestingly, the most substantial surge in interest came from associates actively seeking purchase opportunities.

After the pandemic, many associates felt destabilised. With pay rates slashed and without the same government support offered to practice owners, running a business offered future security and more control over their finances.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Dentist Gavin Barry qualified from Trinity College Dublin in 2004, receiving a scholarship in recognition of his achievements.

He has continued to build his career. He is qualified in implant

dentistry, having trained with Nobel Biocare, and is now a general practitioner with an interest in cosmetic and implant dentistry.

But as a one-time associate, he understands the motivation to seize control of your career and decided to plunge into practice ownership earlier last year after re-evaluating his career path.

'I started my career in a mainly NHS practice in Frinton-on-Sea in 2004,' he says. 'Since then, I have practised in several clinics in Earls Colne, Colchester, Ipswich and Nayland.'

'I had been an associate for almost 20 years, but sadly, my last practice owners treated me unfairly. It was a mixed practice with a great community feel, but things changed when the practice was sold to a dental corporate, and I decided corporate dentistry was not the path I wanted my career to follow.'

He had enjoyed a long-term collaborative relationship with Tom Cutmore, MD at Dental Applications, a specialist dental lab based in Colchester, Essex, who invited him to partner in the practice. Gavin explains: 'I have worked with Tom for over 10 years. He and his team are fantastic dental technicians,

Step inside...

THE PRACTICE

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Ashleigh Barry - receptionist
Cheryl Phipson - facial aesthetician*

CLOVER DENTAL
COLCHESTER



PRACTICE DESIGN

and my confidence to treat more complex cases has grown, knowing Tom is involved with my patients.

'Tom wanted to spend more clinical time with the cases we are treating, and when I started planning the business, I wanted him to be part of our team.'

BUILDING THE DREAM

He found the perfect location – a squat practice in Colchester – and opened the doors to Clover Dental on 25 September. A two-surgery new build, Gavin already has a goal in his sights – to have the third surgery operating within 12 months.

He says: 'The location is unbelievable – we are on a bustling road, a three-minute walk from Colchester train station, a 10-minute walk to the city centre, and across the road from a major bus route. We also have ample parking.'

The refurbishment took four and a half months, but only after numerous delays with the council and planning permission.

'The first time I saw the partition walls going up in May,' Gavin recalls, 'I knew it was finally happening after many months of delays and uncertainty.'

The project's highlight was inevitably when he walked into the reception area in September to his first day as a practice owner.

Key to the successful experience was the team from SPS Dental, equipment, design and installation specialists, who helped Gavin safely navigate the whole process from start to finish.

'The team was incredible,' he says. 'I had spoken to a few companies, and when I first met Laurence from SPS, I knew I wanted to work with him. Laurence is a patient guy who will encourage all ideas and suggestions.'

'He took me through every stage of the surgery planning and design and introduced me to the architect Chris Bateman and a fantastic builder, Sargis Misakyan. The SPS engineers and support staff have been excellent with the handover stage and handling any questions we've had as we started.'

As part of the installation process, SPS also helped Gavin choose the chairs for the practice.

Gavin explains: 'I've always worked on Belmont chairs and found them consistently reliable. When Laurence showed me the Eurus S1, it was exactly what I wanted for Clover.'

With intuitive touchscreen, integrated chair foot controls, and flexible lighting, they are designed to maximise control, convenience and hygiene.

'I liked the design, its ease of use – and, above all, the chair looks very slick,' Gavin adds.

CALM AND COLLECTED

Meanwhile, he harnessed the team's talents at Glitch Marketing, based in Essex, to create the practice's signature colours and branding.

Gavin recalls: 'When we started the planning stage, we mainly focused on providing a relaxed and welcoming practice without the sterile and clinical feel in the non-clinical areas. So, I chose greys and blue/greys as the main colour palette in our branding.'

The result is serene, smart and welcoming and aptly reflects Gavin's aspirations for a relaxed environment.



So, what advice would he offer any dentist considering developing a squat? For Gavin, planning and patience are everything.

'Be prepared for delays and setbacks – they are going to happen,' he says.

'Get a good team that has worked together on previous projects if possible. My architect, surgery designer and builder have a great working relationship, making that aspect of the project easy for me.'

'And make sure you budget 15-20% over all the estimates and four-to-six weeks on the anticipated completion time,' he says.

'Also, if planning is needed, submit any planning and designs as early as possible; this was the longest delay on our project. And do submit the CQC application as early as possible.'

REFLECTION

Amid a challenging era marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, geopolitical conflicts and changing landscapes in dentistry, Gavin's journey from associate to the proud owner of Clover Dental is a testament to the power of professional reflection, careful planning and assembling a dedicated team.

For those contemplating a similar leap, plan meticulously, surround yourself with loyal people – and be prepared to weather the storms.