

# The Private Squat Practice - Myth or Reality?

*Arun Mehra FCA, is Managing Director of Samera Limited - Dental Chartered Accountants and Practice Management Experts whose mission is to help dentists build better businesses.*



## **F**or the faint-hearted, setting up a private squat practice is a challenge.

Yet, with goodwill values remaining at all time highs, NHS contracts getting harder to obtain, setting up a private squat practice is potentially the only avenue available for Associate Dentists and Specialists to have their own practice.

But setting up a private squat doesn't have to be a challenge: no doubt it is hard work and not for everyone, but, if carried out correctly, it can prove to be very rewarding personally and financially.

In the last six years, I have been personally involved with my wife, Dr Smita Mehra, (a GDP) in setting up three private general and specialist dental practices, The Neem Tree, based in London and Surrey (our newest venture is in Esher, Surrey and is due to open in Spring 2010). In addition, through my business Samera Limited, I have been personally involved in many more successful ventures. No doubt, the first practice is where we made most of our mistakes, but since then, we have managed to develop a formula for setting up successful practices for clients and ourselves.

### **The Neem Tree – Esher, Surrey**

In our current venture, we have had to deal with many issues which never arose in our Wandsworth or Canary Wharf sites, such as:

1. Dealing with obtaining D1 planning permission and Grade 2 issues with the council
2. Trying to help and house a homeless man living in one of the sheds on the site and liaising with the probation service and police
3. Negotiating a £1m plus loan with the banks in this current economic environment!

*The list goes on...*

As you can see from this short list, none of these issues relate to dentistry (the easy bit!), but plain old common sense and business acumen.

For anyone looking to set up a practice, I have summarised the key factors I personally feel are essential to make a success of a private squat.

### **1. Passionate leadership**

Leadership qualities – passion for their future business is essential for anyone setting up a private squat. You will need to work other people, lead them, coach them, even when things hit rock bottom, people will be looking to you for answers.

That's why before you even decide on setting up a squat practice, ask yourself the question, "Are you truly passionate about making a success of your venture?"

*No passion, then forget about it.*

### **2. Putting it on paper**

If you feel you have the passion and the gusto, the key is then planning. Clarify your vision and mission, do your research thoroughly, ask for help and then put all your wonderful passionate ideas into a written business plan. Always seek professional help to create your business plan, as this will be the tool which will get you from where you are now (as an Associate), to where you want to reach (a successful private practice owner).

### **3. Location, location, location**

Cliché or not, getting the right location for your venture is an essential component of a successful new private practice.

The hardest thing in any new business is getting customers or patients, so being hidden from your target customer base in terms of location can prove to be commercial suicide.

Always pay a premium for the right location, because if you don't, your

future marketing costs will always be high. Short term pain in terms of higher rent usually leads to long term gain as your marketing expenses will be lower, and hence profits higher.

### **4. Build a team of professionals**

We always believe in getting experts to help you with your business, don't try to cut corners as 9 times out of 10 they will come back to haunt you. So hire a team of accomplished advisors, designers, builders, accountants... who know what they are doing to help you achieve your dream private practice.

Remember, when designing the practice, be different, don't be the same as the practice down the road, dare to be a little risky, as this will get your customers to notice you, even before you open! Get a great designer, don't do it yourself!

### **5. Raising cash and being tight with the purse strings**

Armed with a detailed business plan and robust financial forecasts, you should start approaching various banks to support the venture.

Sticking to your budget is paramount to getting the business off the ground successfully. Don't be swayed by the salesman!

### **So is setting up a practice for everyone?**

Probably not. It requires stepping out of your comfort zone many a time, working extremely hard, taking decisions that impact on not just you but many others too, and basically putting yourself on the line. If you relish that kind of challenge and possess an appetite for calculated risks then you probably need to set up your own orthodontic practice!

For further help call Samera on 020 7100 8788 or visit [www.settingupinpractice.com](http://www.settingupinpractice.com) and [www.samera.co.uk](http://www.samera.co.uk)