



The big decision



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So..... a new practice is on the cards. The next big decisions are....which locality is best, what type of precinct and how many clinical chairs.

Having a basic understanding of statutory controls that apply is beneficial. Town planning statutes may allow or prohibit a dental practice in certain locations. I thought it beneficial

to run through the various factors that need to be considered in the search. Due to the limits of space, this column will address primarily the physical and statutory issues, as the business decision has as many variables as there are practitioners.

ZONING

Local Council establishes a framework of zones in every locality. This is primarily to support the quiet amenity of surrounding residential areas that are then serviced by a central business district (CBD) and regional centres for retail, business and commercial needs.

It is important to note that a dental practice will not be freely allowed in all zones. Some Councils may allow a 'small' dental practice in a residential zone, but beware of severe limitations to growth. In some precincts Councils will actually prohibit healthcare services. They may want retail showrooms, industrial services etc. in these locations. To work around these restrictions may take time and specialist town planning submissions.

It is critically important to check the suitability of the site and zone with Council prior to committing to any land, or property purchase, or tenancy lease.

SIZE AND SPACE

A general rule of thumb useful in working out the floor area needed for a practice can be a multiple of 35 – 45 square metres x the number of clinical rooms + consult rooms required. For example, if you want 4 surgeries with one separate non-clinical consult room, you should be looking for tenancies in the vicinity of 175 (5x35) – 225 (5x45) m² of internal area. A tenancy of 180 m² will be more ‘compact’ to accommodate the requirements than one of 220m².

For a greenfield site, it is preferable from an investment perspective, to find land of at least 1,000m². It is best to accommodate a minimum of 4-6 surgeries generally to warrant the investment in land and building. Council setback limitations from front, side and rear, will establish the available building envelope. A side setback of less than 3m will trigger stringent fire safety requirements, generally limiting windows and openings. Then you need to allow for carparking and vehicular circulation on the site. To allow for vehicles to enter and exit in a forward direction, turning bays and parking space, a multiple of 35m² per vehicle is a useful rule of thumb. The building footprint will also be 10 – 20% greater than the internal area, allowing for wall thickness, entry foyers, etc.

An example of a 4 surgery practice + non clinical consult room, on a block of 20m x 50m:

Front setback of 6 metres (depends on zone)	120m ²
Side setbacks of 3 metres (building only)	150m ²
Rear setback of 2 metres (depends on zone)	40m ²
Building internal area	220m ²
Allowance for foyers, wall thickness etc	40m ²
Car parking for 12 cars (12 x 35m ²)	420m ²
TOTAL	990m ²

VISIBILITY

While it is of course preferable to build a patient base by having a practice that is easily seen and attracts patients visually, these sites may come with premium purchase or rental costs. A successful practice can also be built in less costly, less visible locations as long as the practice invests in ‘visibility’ through continued marketing.

CAR PARKING

Parking can be the primary bugbear in finding suitable sites as most Councils require 3-5 car spaces for each practitioner on site. If this is not available, it can be argued successfully at times, however, it can be protracted and costly as traffic studies/ traffic engineering reports can be required, neighbours often complain and there is no guarantee of success.

Residential sites can be difficult in providing the compliant



access and number of spaces, as well as being a source of noise and traffic disruption to neighbours in some circumstances.

The exception to this requirement is only in highly built up CBD areas where public parking stations or public transport is readily available, and no parking is required.

SUPPORT

Briefing a commercial agent with requirements can be of great assistance in finding a site. A brief needs to include site / floor area needed, distance from public transport (considered for patients and staff), proposed lease period, parking requirements, visibility, disabled access requirements, preferred aspect / outlook etc. Once they find a site with potential, they can follow up in providing more detail for consideration such as tenancy manuals, lease terms, floorplans, sections of building etc.

Once a potential site has been found, there are a number of further requirements necessary to ensure the site is suitable for the proposed practice. We will look at a SITE CHECKLIST in the next column. ♦

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