

The benefits of expanding and refurbishing your practice

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There are many benefits to refurbishing or relocating your dental practice, and although the decision to make such major physical changes to your surgery is usually secondary to other financial concerns, most practitioners find that they receive more than the obvious benefits with a new surgery. The opportunity to streamline the operation of your practice and attract new patients can be immensely profitable to your business. By increasing the functionality of your surgery, the productivity of your staff will improve. Patients will also feel more comfortable in a fresh, well-organised, private practice.

After about ten years, the furnishings and fittings in most dental practices become worn. Fashions also

change—to such an extent that even the most stylish design in 1997 can simply highlight the age of your practice today. Patients expect a clean, modern surgery design and associate it with the highest standards in health care. Most commercial leases are for five years, so the end of your second lease is often a convenient time to consider relocating your practice. Generally, the life of your equipment is also about ten years, considering changes in technology and the availability of spare parts.

The main factors involved in the decision regarding a new surgery are room for expansion, practice image, privacy for patients and staff, movement and functionality, standards of hygiene, and the age

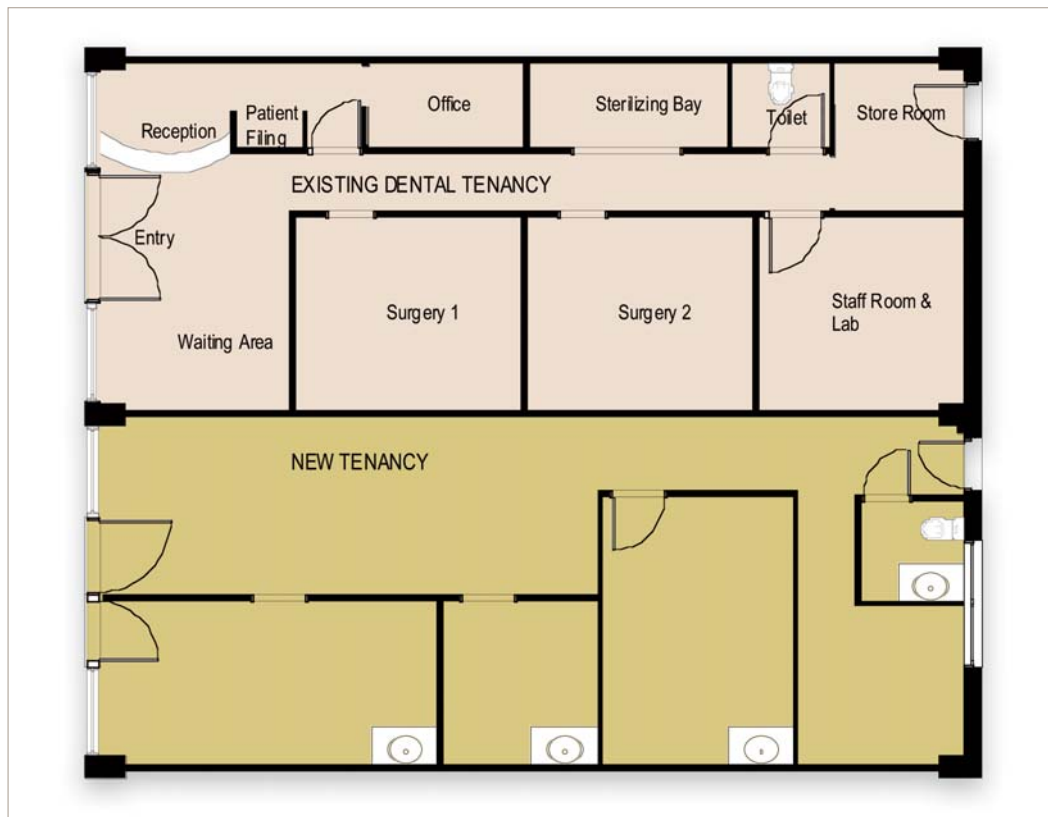


Fig. 1 _ Before.



Fig. 2 After extension into adjoining tenancy.

of equipment. Relocating to larger premises allows for the expansion of your surgery and the facilities to take on more staff, and therefore, more patients. Space adjoining your existing premises may be available, and awareness of such opportunities is worthwhile.

Should you update the overall image of your practice during refurbishment, you could address aspects such as the finishes, graphics, visibility, staff image and the facilities in your practice. Major refurbishment or relocation gives you an opportunity to overhaul the image of your practice, which can help you attract potential patients and retain existing ones.

The traffic flow in your practice should allow for easy movement by staff and patients, whilst maintaining the privacy of both. Refurbishing gives you the opportunity to redesign the layout of your practice, and make better use of the space available. Moving into a new space means your surgery can be designed based on the knowledge of your previous layout—its benefits and disadvantages.

Your practice will ensure a higher standard of infection control with new fit-out and streamlined surfaces to clean. An advantage of relocation or a major refurbishment is the opportunity to upgrade equipment and reassess storage needs. The size and accessibility requirements of new equipment and storage can be integrated into the design of a new practice.

Relocation carries a greater financial risk than refurbishment, owing to the time it may take to secure new premises and an increase in short-term expenses, but this is usually outweighed by an increase in business. Fitting out a new space also eliminates the inconvenience of an interruption to the operation of your surgery, as you can continue practising in your old premises until the new space has been finished.

Should you consider relocating your surgery, start looking around generally for commercial premises in your area 18 months in advance, in order to better determine the range of spaces available and learn of future opportunities? Looking ahead of time will help you to secure a space that is appropriate and affordable for your new surgery. Should you inform agents and owners that you are looking for premises, these opportunities may come to you.

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