

Dental Hygiene

Focus:

Different Business Models in Independent Dental Hygiene



Beyond the Chair: Redefining Independent Dental Hygiene Through Collaboration

by Jessica Vancolen, RDH, BSc • allaboutmepei@outlook.com

When I first envisioned opening my own independent dental hygiene practice, I imagined a space where patients could receive high-quality, preventive oral health care in a welcoming, spa-like environment. What I didn't realize then was how my business model would grow into something bigger than dental hygiene alone—a collaborative hub for health and wellness practitioners.

Like many independent dental hygienists, my journey began with the drive to create autonomy in my practice. I wanted the freedom to offer appointments that focused on prevention and education in a comfortable environment, not just routine treatment. Independence would allow me to spend more time with patients, tailor their care, and build meaningful relationships. But along the way, an unexpected opportunity presented itself: the chance to purchase a building large enough to share clinic space with other health professionals.



Today, I lease space to a practitioner of Chinese medicine and a nurse practitioner who provides medical aesthetic services (Redefine Beauty Aesthetics). While on the surface, our businesses may seem to offer three very different services, in practice our model works beautifully. Patients appreciate the convenience of accessing multiple types of care under one roof. They may come in for a dental hygiene appointment but leave with curiosity about acupuncture or the confidence boost of a rejuvenating skin treatment. Likewise, patients visiting the building for aesthetics or Chinese medicine are introduced to independent dental hygiene for the first time. It's a natural, reciprocal flow of referrals and awareness.

This collaborative environment benefits not only patients but also the practitioners themselves. Working independently can sometimes feel isolating, especially when you're wearing every hat: clinician, administrator, marketer, and business owner. Sharing space fosters a sense of community. We exchange ideas, support one another, and even share resources where possible. It creates the energy of a group practice while allowing each of us to remain fully independent.

Continued...

Focus: Different Business Models in Independent Dental Hygiene

Beyond the Chair: Redefining Independent Dental Hygiene...cont'd

It has also been invaluable to have an experienced business owner leasing space in my clinic. Watching how she has built her own successful practice has provided mentorship and inspiration that I didn't know I needed, but deeply value. That experience has motivated me to support and encourage other women in business whenever I can, whether through collaboration, sharing lessons learned or simply cheering each other on.

Financially, this model has also been an asset. Renting space offsets overhead costs, which is one of the biggest barriers that dental hygienists face when venturing into business ownership. For me, it has made my business more sustainable and allowed me to focus more on patient care and growth. For my colleagues, it eliminates the burden of outfitting an entire clinic from scratch, giving them an affordable and professional space to grow their own practices.

More importantly, though, this approach has changed how patients see dental hygiene. By positioning our service alongside other health care and wellness offerings, oral health becomes part of the larger conversation about overall well-being. Patients begin to see their dental hygiene appointments not as an isolated commitment, but as part of taking care of themselves holistically. That shift is powerful.

Of course, there were challenges along the way: learning how to balance the logistics of multiple practitioners in one space and scheduling, marketing, and maintaining a consistent patient experience. It also required trust: choosing collaborators whose values aligned with mine and who respected the professionalism of the clinic. But those efforts have been more than worthwhile.

If there's one piece of advice I'd offer to other dental hygienists exploring business ownership, it's this: don't be afraid to think outside the box. Independent practice doesn't need to look one way. Some may thrive as solo dental hygienists; others may find strength in partnership. For me, the path forward has been rooted in collaboration, community, and a willingness to evolve.



Looking back, I see that the heart of independent dental hygiene is not only about autonomy, it's about possibility—the possibility to design a practice that reflects your values, serves your patients, and contributes to the community in unique ways. My clinic may have started as “just” a dental hygiene practice, but today it is a multidisciplinary space that serves our community daily. And if my story can inspire even one dental hygienist to dream a little bigger about what independent practice can be, then sharing it has been worth it.