

work, installation of new equipment, or a careless employee. Determining responsibility is at the heart of subrogation.

ACTIONS THE DENTIST SHOULD TAKE

Practice owners can help the claim and/or subrogation process go more smoothly by keeping any damaged or defective items until the claims representative instructs them to dispose of them. Dentists may inadvertently get rid of this evidence so they can allow a vendor or contractor to replace the damaged equipment. Retaining such equipment allows it to be evaluated for potential subrogation recovery. Not retaining it can delay payment or lead to a denial of the claim.

In addition, dentists are responsible for notifying the insurance company immediately. The report should include any injuries and the names of witnesses. Dentists should also refrain from offering to cover losses suffered by neighbors or other parties. Practice owners should never admit fault or speculate to others about why the event occurred.

Practice owners should also take reasonable steps to prevent any safety risks or further damage. Property such as windows, doors, or roofs should be secured as needed. Not only the police should be notified in the event of a crime, but any banks or credit card companies should be alerted to any missing debit or credit cards. Dentists can photograph damaged property before it is repaired.

In addition, the dentist should keep accurate records and receipts for what was spent either repairing or securing the property. Any items that could be cleaned or repaired rather than replaced should be separated from those needing replacement.

Clinical Significance

When a fire, a burglary, or some other event causes property damage occurs, the dentist should carefully follow the instructions of his or her insurer and document whatever is altered. In addition, dentists need to contact patients to reassure them and make arrangements for their treatment, should that be necessary. Taking the needed steps to smooth the course of the claim will help to get the practice up and running more quickly so it can return to serving patients.

TDIC Risk Management Staff: Whodunit? Subrogation determines responsibility in property claims. *Calif Dent Assoc J* 46:589-590, 2018

Reprints not available

REFERENCE CHECKING

Avoiding making a hiring mistake



BACKGROUND

When looking to hire someone for a dental office, dentists need to carefully look into the references that applicants supply. People who are less than honest about their backgrounds know that dental offices are great places to look for employment because they conduct superficial and often easily defeated background checking. For a fee, certain websites will supply references that help people who have tainted pasts pass reference checks. Those who have criminal pasts aren't rare—in fact about a quarter of US adults have a criminal record. The prevalence of falsifying résumés or padding them has been estimated to exceed 50%. Hiring mistakes can be overcome by taking some important steps when checking references.

REFERENCE CHECKING TIPS

1. Check each applicant's photo identification and some other institutionally issued cards or IDs carefully. Using someone else's name is a common way to hide a criminal past.

2. Speak to every former employer of the applicant over the previous 5 years. Character references aren't really that important.

3. Contact and talk with every work reference listed for the previous 5 years. Written reference letters are too easy to fake or forge. All work references should be contacted by phone.

4. Never call a phone number that the applicant has given you. Instead, find the phone numbers independently and ensure that you are speaking to the right former employer.

5. Ensure that the office being called is a real business. Dentists are all registered with the state board, so it should be easy to verify that the office is a dental office. The site ratemds.com also offers patient reviews for nearly every dental practice. If the reference isn't to a dental office, there may be a website to check. Equifax also maintains listings on nearly every legitimate company.

6. Make sure you are speaking to the right person. If the place is a dental office, speak to the practice owner first. He or she may

transfer you to the office manager, but you should still begin with the dentist. For nondental small businesses, identify and speak to the owner. For nondental larger companies, human resources (HR) departments provide reference information, but it's important to know that it may be limited.

7. Get a reference from the applicant's current or most recent employer. If you are asked not to contact a current employer because he or she doesn't know the applicant is leaving, you should inform the applicant that you don't hire anyone without speaking to the most recent employer. You can defer the conversation but you will not finalize any offer of employment without contacting this employer.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Every former employer should be asked specific questions that will help you weed out applicants who are being dishonest. These include the following:

- What were the start and end dates of the individual's employment?
- What job titles did the applicant hold?
- Who did the applicant work for before and after this job?
- Who ended the employment relationship?
- Would the applicant be rehired if given the opportunity?

DISCUSSION

Too often "serial embezzlers" would not have been hired if the dental offices had used careful, thorough reference-checking procedures. Often dental offices are motivated by the perception that there is a shortage of qualified applicants for their open position. It pays to resist any urge to rush through the hiring process because the cost of hiring an embezzler is far greater than that associated with conducting proper screening before hiring.

Clinical Significance

Most of the applicants for a vacancy in a dental office are honest and valid applicants who will become excellent employees. By following a careful procedure when checking references, it's more likely that the bad apples won't be hired by your dental practice.

Harris D: Reference-check essentials: Helping you master your hiring process. *Dent Econ* 109:23-24, 2019

Reprints not available

RETIREMENT

Strategies to prepare for retirement



BACKGROUND

Dentists are retiring at an average age of 69 years today, which is 4 years later than in 2001. The national retirement age of dentists has fluctuated as the economy has changed. It is wise to plan for retirement from the beginning of a dental career so that it's possible to have the resources to fund the type of retirement desired. Some guidelines, tools, and tips can help dentists achieve their goals for retirement income.

SAVINGS STRATEGIES

Forty percent of the dentists in the United States are age 55 years or older, yet nearly half of these dentists say changes in the economy are forcing them to continue practicing beyond their planned retirement date. Planning for retirement is relevant at every stage of the dentist's career, with specific strategies fitting each stage.

It is recommended that dentists start thinking about retirement when they first begin practicing. This includes calculating the amount of money needed to retire comfortably. Dentists today expect to live on an average of \$127,000 annually after entering

retirement. This should be a guide to putting together a successful retirement plan.

In addition, the dentist should formulate clear goals, commit to a well-structured savings plan, and, often, consult experts to help in reaching his or her objectives. It may be difficult to set aside a great deal of money at the beginning. Tools such as 401(k) plans can help begin the savings habit. When cash flow improves, more money can be contributed. Various types of IRAs are available and should be investigated to determine which is best.

For dentists who plan to retire in the next 5 or 10 years, there has been a shift from employer-managed pensions to individually managed 401(k)s, a significant increase in health care costs, and several economic recessions that have caused professional and market losses. After the 2008 recession, many dentists experienced a significant decline in revenue. Diligence and patience are required to survive such fluctuations. A financial planner should be consulted to help set up a well-diversified portfolio.

Among the sources of funds for dentists are private savings such as IRAs, simplified employee pensions, 401(k) funds, Social Security