Working for others or as a private practitioner?

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Introduction

As students progress through allied health educational programs, many begin to consider their 'ideal' first job. Factors influencing choice often include the client group to be served, salary and benefits, opportunities for advancement, geographic location, and the options of being an employee or self-employed private practitioner.

There are pros and cons to being an employee or private practitioner, and each are to be considered in the context of an individual's personal, financial and professional assets and liabilities. The majority of allied health graduates work as employees early in their careers, possibly due to concerns about expectations for managerial and clinical competence in private practice (Adamson, Harris et al, 1996). Opportunities for clinical supervision and mentoring as an employee provide graduates with the support required to progress knowledge and skills from 'novice' to an experienced practitioner. Many allied health graduates also experience financial burden when completing tertiary studies, so the security offered through regular income as an employee often influences job choice.

In contrast, working as a private practitioner offers the opportunity to be one's 'own boss', allowing for flexibility in work schedules that accommodate family or other personal responsibilities. There are however, substantial costs in establishing a new practice with expenditure often exceeding income in the first year(s) of operation. Taking holidays or sick leave may compromise client needs, and additional staff may be required to maintain services. Consequently the private practitioner often also plays the role of employer.

Four major systems impact on Australian allied health practitioners' employment options. These are employment and related law, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation and codes of professional conduct. There is a plethora of specific Acts, Regulations

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professional respect and recognition. This supports a mutuality of responsibility for learning and professional development.

- Retain the services of a financial planner to manage and advise on the separation and/or integration of personal and business financial positions.

- Seek and obtain legal advice to protect and distinguish between personal and business related assets and matters for security as both a private practitioner and an employees.

- Practitioners should maintain current knowledge in their area(s) of professional practice. This is an ethical commitment to the development of the profession, their business, themselves and the client group they serve.

- An employer's duty of care to provide a safe work environment extends to ensuring their employees are professionally competent. This involves employees keeping abreast of developments in the chosen area of practice and a joint responsibility for maintaining best practice.

- Practitioners should surround themselves with resources (including human resources) to facilitate their continuous development of professional practice skills and to remain life-long learners.

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