

And the bonus ball is...

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Well, what would you do with the money?

With few exceptions, it is a dream for most of us, an 'I wish' that if the genie of the dental light or our fairy godmother could grant, we would ask it of them: winning the lottery. The crossed fingers and lucky charms that our patients employ (usually unnecessarily I hasten to add) on the night before a treatment visit or in the waiting room on the day, are as nothing compared with the sheer numbers that greet the famous Dale Winton-induced jumble of balls bouncing around the perspex case on a Saturday evening.

This, despite the smug self-congratulatory smirks from statistical experts who regularly tell us there is as much chance of winning as there is of being struck by lightning. It is a measure of our complete disregard for the science and art of mathematics that we all dismiss such gloomy predictions with the unanswerable and supremely optimistic response 'but someone has to win'. Everyone has their own supposedly fool-proof method for picking the winning combination and I have often marvelled at the fact that all the numbers for the FDI adult tooth notation fall within the 1 to 49 – how about selecting the recorded digits of the last six teeth you've restored that week? (I want a percentage of the winnings if it works for you).

But what would you do if you won? It's something of a cliché of course, but what is the answer that so many of us give when we're asked 'what would you do if you won the lottery?' Usually we give the stock reply, 'well I'd give up work of course'. But would we?

The thought of not having to go to work anymore is very appealing. It is even better than the feeling that you get when leaving a practice and gradually counting down the days and more particularly the least favourite, or downright awful, patients as they pass under our mirror and probe for a final time. This is all the more delicious if they don't know you're leaving. They think they'll be seeing you again next time, whether in a week or six months, whereas

you are secretly smiling as you enjoy your mental image of their expression when they cross the surgery threshold and stop stock still gawping disbelievingly at the new, partially visible face behind the mask. Your delight is heightened even more if you know who is replacing you and that they won't stand for anything like the nonsense from this individual that you have. The picture of the ensuing conflict is entirely unprofessional and quite beneath you, but wonderfully enjoyable just the same.

However, as a counterbalance, there is always the creeping discomfort of the knowledge that the colleague currently keeping your 'new' operating chair warm before they too move on, will be gleefully thinking exactly the same about the patients he or she is now saying goodbye to.

No such qualms with the leaving dentistry for good situation though; that's that forever. No more grumpy patients, endless

you at all and will be merely the stuff of the rare insecure dream, the merry dinner-party anecdote or the fleeting passage of a transiently curious thought as to what's happening in your old life now.

But would it really be that simple? To begin with, it is highly likely that the news of your 'win' would spread like wildfire through the locality. Or do you think you'd be able to keep it a secret? What are the real chances of you turning up for work on the Monday after your cash scoop in exactly the same frame of mind as before? Nil. You'd be so eager to tell everyone that by the time you reached for your tuna sandwiches (sorry, smoked salmon and cream cheese hand-cut organically baked bread luncheon) every patient on the list would be queuing up for free treatment ... because you can afford it for them.

And appealing as doing nothing all day might seem now, the chances are that like

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denture eases, people who don't like their crowns, can't stand their veneers, complain about being kept waiting, argue about the cost, deliberately defy your instructions and misunderstand the information you give them. Gone will be the nurse who is always late, the hygienist who questions your treatment plans, the practice manager who never orders what you ask. Never more will you need to worry over the amalgam question, the fluoride controversy or whether it is better to brush before or after a meal. Lab work that doesn't arrive in time, hardly fits, is delivered with the wrong patient's name on or breaks when you take it off the model and drop it would all, all, yes, all be things of the past.

As you tip back in your pool-side lounge in Monaco, none of this will touch

most dentists you actually like 'doing' things. Sure a two-week holiday is fine, a temporary break is ideal but a temporary break for always? No more team members, really? No hassle, no decisions to make, no more satisfaction on patients' faces and their smiling thanks for a job well done? I'm not so sure.

Of course, there is an easy alternative. If you won say, £3 million, you could elect to use the whole sum by giving every one of your 30,000 colleagues in the UK, £100 each. But would you? What would you do with the money? Think carefully before you cross off your next six numbers and say 'I wish'.

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