

## **SDDS Member Survey conducted from: December 9 to December 13, 2018 re: SDDS On-call service**

Coming in to the SDDS presidency this year, there are a number of issues that I want to tackle head-on and get sorted out ASAP. The on-call service is a big one.

The Sudbury District Dental Society On-call Service has always been a key component of the SDDS as a component society. Here in Sudbury, we have a unique situation compared to many other cities in Ontario where we have the luxury of enjoying our weekends and competition isn't fierce enough in this area requiring us to work extended evening and weekend hours. As a result, there's always been a bit of a question in how we provide service to our patients when our offices aren't open many evenings and weekends throughout the year. There was also Dr. Bob D'Aloisio that personally took care of many of Sudbury's emergencies and since he passed away, there has been a large void that was left behind that we're still working to completely fill!

Before going into the details of everything, I just wanted to thank everyone that took time to give feedback with the surveys I sent out, as well as directly by phone and e-mail. Your input is crucial to making sure that our organization operates as openly and democratically as possible. I wanted to once again commend Dr. Diamond and Dr. Leclair for ensuring the service didn't dissolve over the last year with Dr. D'Aloisio's passing as they have put countless hours into keeping things running. I also want to thank Dr. Ulrichsen for all of his time and effort over the years in preparing the assignment lists and overseeing the service.

As Dr. Diamond pointed out with the Feb/Mar 2015 issue of the RCDSO Dispatch (attached), the wording is clear that we have an obligation to serve our patients in need of emergency treatment. I highly recommend reading the one page document if you haven't already because it's very clear in what's expected of us. There are two really important statements in that Dispatch article:

- Section 2(18) of the professional misconduct regulations made under the Dentistry Act, 1991 (Ontario Regulation 853/93) defines professional misconduct as "failing to make arrangements for emergency dental services for the member's patients or to advise a patient how to obtain emergency dental services." Failure to do so may also expose a dentist to allegations of patient abandonment.
- An emergency protocol should be developed so that patients who have a dental emergency during regular office hours may be attended to in a timely fashion. Such patients may be seen by the dentist of record where possible, or another dentist in the same office, and should be accommodated either the same day or the next day at the latest.

Dr. Diamond also researched and worked to define what a dental emergency is, which is a term that even the RCDSO isn't clear about defining at time. Schedule D (attached again for convenience) defines emergency and urgent care and uses parallels from a comparable jurisdiction in the National Health Service (NHS – England) to help us form a definition.

Based on your feedback and our current on-call exec's discussions (Drs. Diamond, Leclair, McNicholl, Ulrichsen, Tassone), as well as your e-mail and phone feedback, there's going to be a number of changes to the service this year. You can also see the visual results of the surveys conducted at the end of this document.

### **Which Patients Are Eligible / Billing**

Our goal with the SDDS on-call service is to manage all patients of record of active SDDS members experiencing after-hours dental issues. Patients that are true dental emergencies must be seen (or referred to Health Sciences North depending on the severity), patients that are urgent dental situations should be seen, and those with routine, elective, or self-help care can often be managed just over the phone. The goal of the SDDS On-call service is not to be the 911 of dental service in Sudbury. The service has been abused over the years by patients that have no dentist of record and are using the service for the convenience of being seen on the weekend for issues that have been a problem for months.

Due to privacy reasons, there is no way for us to have a centralized directory of patients and which office they belong to, so we're forced to take the patient's word for it if they indicate there's a dentist they regularly see. We will however send out a list of who is and who isn't participating with the on-call service, as well as posting it in the member's only section of the member website (to be created soon!) Based on **question 9** of the survey (see below for results), the general membership believes that we should see patients that identify themselves to be a patient of record of another office, even if they are ODSP/OW/HSO, and that we shouldn't be charging additional fees to those patients. It makes sense because if we put up obstacles or refuse to see patients of record of another on-call dentist, the patient can in turn file a complaint against the dentist of record for abandonment (see the Dispatch article). If we all want to rest during the weekends knowing our patients are being taken care of when we're not there, we need to make sure we're each doing what we expect of our colleagues.

On the other hand, if a patient is not a patient of record for any dentist that's a part of our on-call, then anything goes. You can either refuse to see them and encourage them to seek care from any dental office during regular business hours or you can charge additional fees if you're seeing them outside of your regular office hours. This applies to all patients – it can be OW/ODSP/HSO patients, patients without a regular dentist, and patients whose regular dentist does not participate in the on-call service. Of course, you have the option to see these patients and bill accordingly.

Whether an office works on an assignment or non-assignment basis is up to the individual offices. We have no authority to dictate how your office operates with collections. In emergency situations where the patient has never been seen before, most elect to go on a non-assignment basis. Remember that if an ODSP/OW/HSO patient of record of another on-call dentist reports to the office with a valid drug eligibility card, they should be seen on an assignment basis as we are not permitted to charge that demographic for services up front. In the Dispatch article, the RCDSO does state, "The patient's inability to pay should not be a barrier to appropriate palliative treatment of true emergencies." If you come across a situation where the patient of an on-call dentist presents with valid insurance and cannot afford to pay for treatment upfront out-of-pocket, it is at your discretion whether you make an exception in

that situation, keeping in mind that your financial policies should not be a barrier for patients of record of another on-call practice.

### **Answering Calls and Patient Management**

Based on the wording of the RCDSO, a patient “should be accommodated either the same day or the next day at the latest.” During the weekdays, there’s no reason that a patient shouldn’t be seen the same day by the dentist on-call. There are two simple rules for being on-call on the weekend:

- a) There should be no unheard messages left during the on-call hours of operation (see Hours below) when the next dentist on-call during the week checks after the weekend.
- b) Patients of record of on-call dentists that fall into either the emergency or urgent classification need to be seen the same day or the next day at the latest.

There are many ways to schedule an on-call day. We suggest during the week leaving time open in your schedule to accommodate patients calling in. While we give some flexibility as to how you operate during the weekend, patients that need to be seen should be seen during the weekend. Otherwise they should be given the opportunity to schedule with their regular dentist if they are willing to wait beyond the weekend. In the specific case of long weekends where you are assigned 3 on-call days (Saturday and Sunday, Monday except in the case of Easter where it’s Friday, Saturday, Sunday), we leave it up to you how you want to run the long weekends as long as the above 2 rules are accomplished!

### **Treatment**

When it comes to treating our on-call colleagues’ patients, your obligations end at palliative care, which means resolving the patient’s pain/problem until they can be seen by their regular dentist. If the patient chooses to complete treatment with you, that is acceptable, but the patient should never be pushed to commit to treatment or “poached” from the other office in the interest of generating billing. Screening and treatment should be limited to the immediate problem. When treatment is rendered, every effort should be made to forward relevant radiographs and records to the dentist of record. We are all dental professionals, and when seeing patients from another office, professional courtesy is mandatory! We should never be throwing each under the bus!

### **Hours**

I want to point out that while there was a majority of votes for keeping the hours the same (**Figure 8**) some that voted for keeping the current hours also voted for changes to the hours in the same question. This year, we’re going to go forward and try to make life as easy for ourselves as possible.

We're going to run with the following on-call hours:

Monday: 8am to 7pm  
Tuesday: 8am to 7pm  
Wednesday: 8am to 7pm  
Thursday: 8am to 7pm  
Friday: 9am to 5pm  
Saturday: 9am to 5pm  
Sunday: 9am to 5pm

*Note that if you want to answer longer on a day you're on-call, you're more than welcome to!*

As mentioned above, you should see patients the first of the 3 days, and you are permitted to simply screen for the middle day and schedule anyone that isn't a true dental emergency the last day.

### **Assignment of On-Call days**

The following are the ground rules that we've set for the on-call service this year:

- Random assignment was what the majority voted for (Figure 7). On-call weekends will be randomly assigned.
- The second survey (Figure 10) with respect to how to approach the shortage of dentists on-call indicated that a majority want all weekends to be covered. Some dentists will have to do more than one weekend this year. Those doing more than 1 weekend won't be required to do a holiday weekend as one of those weekends, and anyone doing a holiday weekend or multiple weekends this year will not be required to do a holiday or multiple weekends the following year.
- We will always seek out volunteers willing to take extra days first before assigning second weekends to members.
- Weekdays will be assigned randomly to a degree, but we will try to give priority to on-call dentists' requests for certain days of the week where their office is already open longer hours.

### **Rules for Trading / Giving Away**

Trading will be allowed, as it was unanimous to allow it (Figure 1). It should be a fair trade, ie. a weekend for weekend or a weekday for a weekday. When a trade is agreed upon, an e-mail needs to be sent by one of the trading dentists to [sdds.oncall@gmail.com](mailto:sdds.oncall@gmail.com) with the other dentist involved in the trade cc'd in the e-mail. Trading will also prevent any issues with availability. It is a monstrous task to try to put together a year's list of people on-call, especially if everyone has obligations and restrictions for availability. When the list of assignments is released, if you are unable to fulfill your obligations that weekend or during certain weekdays, the onus is on you to trade the day.

When it comes to giving away on-call days, a majority of members want to be able to give away their on-call days (Figure 3). It's also interesting how the group views accountability. It seems that we want to give our days away, but no one is to be held accountable if the day isn't answered (Figures 2 and 4). I think the best example of this was when Dr. D'Aloisio passed away, there were a handful of dentists that

were very upset when asked to take back their days because they had given them away to Dr. D'Aloisio. In order for the on-call service to work, we need to make sure our weekends are covered. All we're asking is for everyone to take one weekend a year. Being on-call one weekend a year allows us to take every other weekend off for the year. Therefore, on an official level, we're not supporting giving away on-call weekends this year. We expect all members to fulfill their obligations of answering the service the days that they're on-call. Unofficially, if you decide to give your day away and the person you give your day away to doesn't answer, we will hold you accountable, so our hope is that you're either do your part and fulfill your obligations, or you better give your day away to someone you trust 100%!

### **Enforcement**

At the end of the day, we shouldn't even need to discuss enforcement. The SDDS is a component society, the members of the exec are volunteering their time to help run the society and the on-call service, and we're all responsible dental professionals running dental practices. We can all relate that when something goes wrong at our dental practices, it's very frustrating when team members dodge blame and no one is accountable for what happened. We've seen this play out multiple times so far this year with the on-call service. Prior to Dr. Diamond and Dr. Leclair stepping up after Dr. D'Aloisio passed away and re-organizing the service, approximately 25% of weekends were going unanswered. We ended up with one on-call member having an RCDSO complaint filed against them because their patient had nowhere to go during the weekend when they were experiencing a dental emergency. There have also been many times where days were supposedly given away, but no one answered that day, and this has been happening as recently as last month. This is a large reason why officially we're not permitting giving away weekends because it has compromised accountability.

By member request, if you fail to fulfill your obligations, you will be issued a warning (Figure 6) and the particulars of when you failed to answer will be provided. We will also track who does and doesn't answer calls on a given day and that information will be made available to the members of the on-call service via the calendar we'll be setting up on the on-call website. Failure to repeatedly fulfill your obligations may lead to suspension or being banned from the service. As of right now, we're starting fresh for 2019, so there is no one suspended. Of course we don't want it to come to suspensions or banning. However, we all have our licenses and practices to protect, and if members that have fulfilled their obligations to the service are having college complaints filed against them because of another office's negligence, then I think it's fair to say that we don't want that negligent office to be part of the on-call team because they're a liability to us all by not answering.

There are times that dentists may forget they're on-call. To help with this, we're going to try to establish a system where on-call dentists are reminded the day before by phone and e-mail that they're on-call. There will also be a website created with a calendar for members to check who's on-call which days.

We are working to form an on-call executive as voted for in the survey (Figure 5). Several individuals have put their names forward and we will offer the general members the chance for vote for the elected individual, and we want to have an odd number of exec members to avoid vote-lock situations. The exec shall also consist of the SDDS President, the SDDS Vice-President, SDDS Treasurer, and the past SDDS

President. The purpose of this executive will be to oversee the running of the on-call service each year. We will also be working to make sure that non-members are not sending patients to our on-call service. As per the Dispatch article, it is not acceptable for non-members to be deferring their emergencies to us without participating.

### **Common Voicemail Message**

“You have reached Dr. Dentist’s office. The office is currently closed. If you would like to leave a message for our office, please stay on the line. If you are experiencing a dental emergency, we participate in a group on-call service. Please contact the on-call service at **705-822-7648**. Please leave your name, telephone number, your regular dentist’s name, and a brief description of your problem. The service is monitored Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Fridays, weekends, and holidays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. only. For **serious dental emergencies** requiring immediate attention such as uncontrolled bleeding, difficulty with breathing or swallowing, or severe facial trauma, please present to *Health Sciences North, Emergency Department*, located at 61 Ramsey Lake Road, Sudbury, Ontario.”

### **Patients Undergoing Cancer Treatment Under the Care of Dr. Saunders**

Dr. Saunders has requested that patients under her care or other dentists can call her directly on her cell after hours at 705-920-0484.

### **Miscellaneous Concerns and Recommendations**

Anyone on sick leave/maternity leave that is not working as a dentist should be exempt from the on-call service. If it happens at some point after the list is assigned, we will ask for volunteers to take the assigned days, but otherwise we will accept that those days will go uncovered.

Seeing patients while working alone is not recommended. To be part of the on-call service, we expect members to be available to see patients and have staff there to assist them at any point during the hours of operation for the on-call service. Your office health and safety policies should be designed to allow you to see patients on-call without jeopardizing your safety.

While we will do our best to ensure that all days are covered. As a backup, if a day is not covered, members may still want to consider leaving a direct contact number for their patients to reach them.

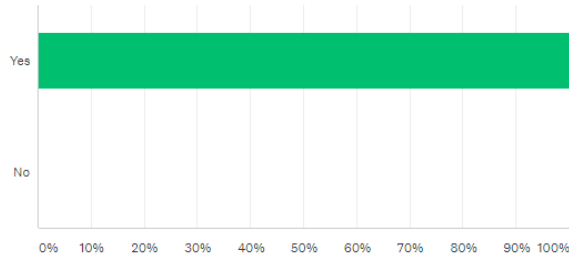
Overall, let’s give things a try as we’ve decided above and see how it goes this year, and towards the end of 2019, we can re-assess and figure out what we need to do to tweak the system. The key to the whole on-call system is participation, so please help me as we all do our part to take care of our patients and keep each other out of trouble by helping each other out when on-call!

Dr. Tyler McNicholl

**Figure 1:**

Do you think it would be acceptable to be able to TRADE (not give away) on-call days with other members?

Answered: 43 Skipped: 0

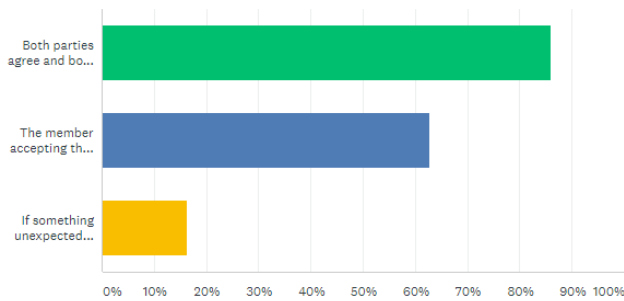


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	100.00% 43
No	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>

**Figure 2:**

Which of the following do you feel are acceptable terms for TRADING on-call days?

Answered: 43 Skipped: 0

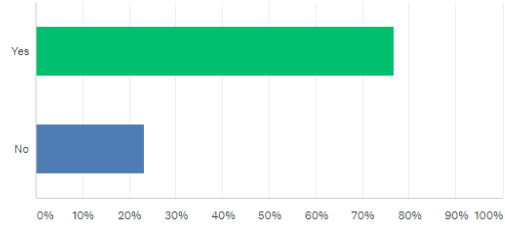


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Both parties agree and both notify the SDDS exec that they want to trade.	86.05% 37
The member accepting the on-call day understands they are fully responsible (as long as both have consented) and they will be potentially suspended if they do not answer that day.	62.79% 27
If something unexpected should happen to the party that took the on-call day (illness, bereavement, family obligation, suspension, death), the member to which the day was originally assigned is responsible for answering calls that day and could be suspended if they don't.	16.28% 7
<b>Total Respondents: 43</b>	

**Figure 3:**

Do you think it would be acceptable to be able to GIVE AWAY on-call days to other willing members without taking one back in return?

Answered: 43 Skipped: 0

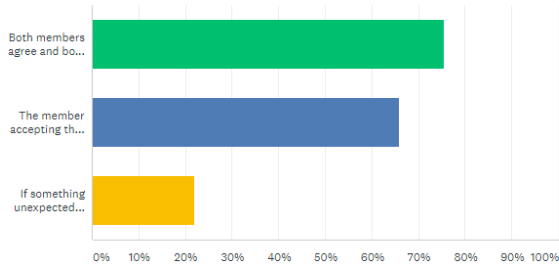


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	76.74% 33
No	23.26% 10
TOTAL	43

**Figure 4:**

Which of the following do you feel are acceptable terms for GIVING AWAY on-call days?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 2

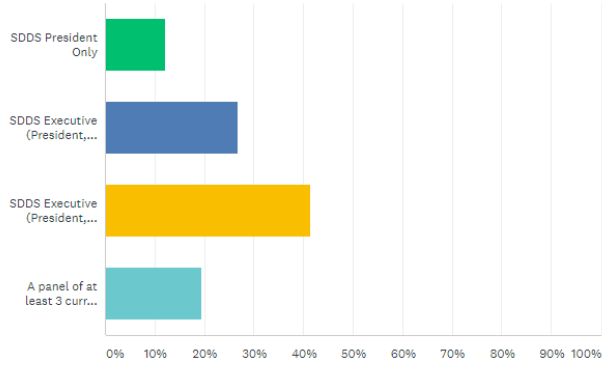


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Both members agree and both notify the SDDS exec that one is giving the day away and the other is willingly accepting the day.	75.61% 31
The member accepting the on-call day understands they are fully responsible (as long as both have consented) and they will be potentially suspended if they do not answer that day.	65.85% 27
If something unexpected should happen to the party that took the on-call day (illness, bereavement, family obligation, suspension, death), the member to which the day was originally assigned is responsible for answering calls that day and could be suspended if they don't.	21.95% 9
Total Respondents: 41	

**Figure 5:**

Who do you think should have the authority to make decisions and police the on-call service?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 2

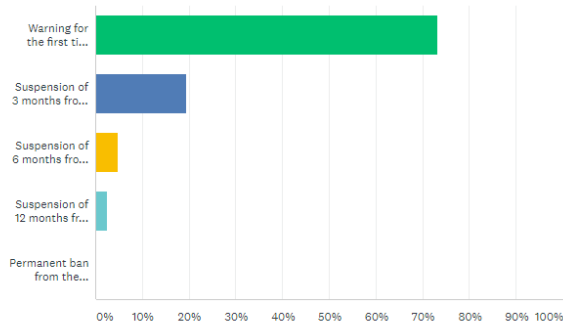


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ SDDS President Only	12.20% 5
▼ SDDS Executive (President, Vice President, Treasurer)	26.83% 11
▼ SDDS Executive (President, Vice President, Treasurer), past president, and a nominated senior adviser who is an active SDDS member	41.46% 17
▼ A panel of at least 3 current SDDS members that are willing to nominate themselves and are elected by a majority of current SDDS members on an annual basis (if this is something you want to do, please put your name forward!)	19.51% 8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>

**Figure 6:**

As we are only asking for one weekend per year from each member, how do you think discipline should work if a member misses their assigned weekend (assuming this is the first and only time they have)?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 2

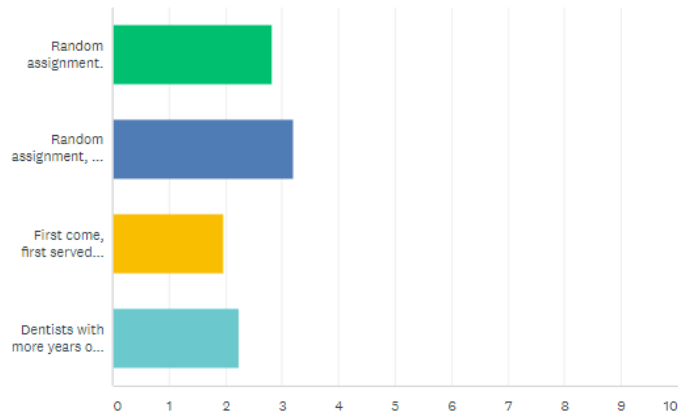


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Warning for the first time, but still allowed to direct calls to the on-call service for the year.	73.17% 30
▼ Suspension of 3 months from the service, not allowed to direct calls to the service during that time.	19.51% 8
▼ Suspension of 6 months from the service, not allowed to direct calls to the service during that time.	4.88% 2
▼ Suspension of 12 months from the service, not allowed to direct calls to the service during that time.	2.44% 1
▼ Permanent ban from the on-call service.	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>

**Figure 7:**

How do you think the weekends should be assigned?

Answered: 43 Skipped: 0

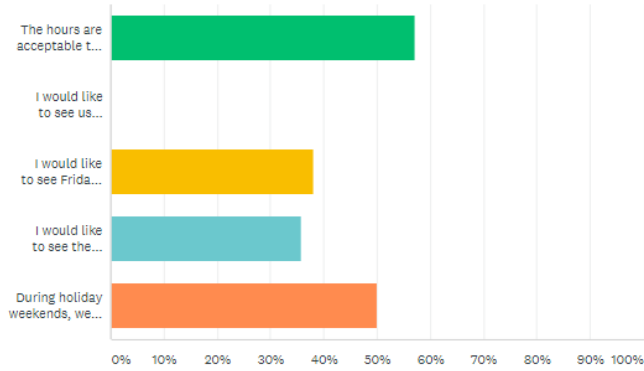


	1	2	3	4	TOTAL	SCORE
Random assignment.	22.22% 8	47.22% 17	22.22% 8	8.33% 3	36	2.83
Random assignment, but if you do a holiday that year, you should be exempt from having to do a holiday again the following year.	50.00% 20	27.50% 11	15.00% 6	7.50% 3	40	3.20
First come, first served for picking.	15.15% 5	6.06% 2	39.39% 13	39.39% 13	33	1.97
Dentists with more years of experience should get first pick of their weekend.	25.71% 9	14.29% 5	17.14% 6	42.86% 15	35	2.23

**Figure 8:**

What changes would you make to the hours of availability for the on-call service? Current hours are 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Saturday, Sunday, and holidays.

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1

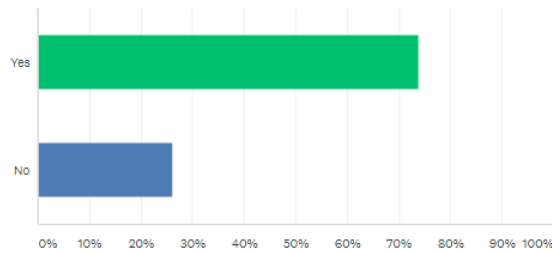


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ The hours are acceptable to me and I would make no changes.	57.14% 24
▼ I would like to see us available for longer hours.	0.00% 0
▼ I would like to see Fridays shortened to 8am to 5pm.	38.10% 16
▼ I would like to see the hours shortened in the months of July and August to 9am to 5pm every day.	35.71% 15
▼ During holiday weekends, we should be permitted to close one of the days. For example, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, etc. could be closed.	50.00% 21
<b>Total Respondents: 42</b>	

**Figure 9:**

Do you agree that members should not charge extra fees to see patients when on-call, that they can operate as they normally do with collecting (assignment or non-assignment), and that they should see existing ODSP and OW patients of other practices?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1

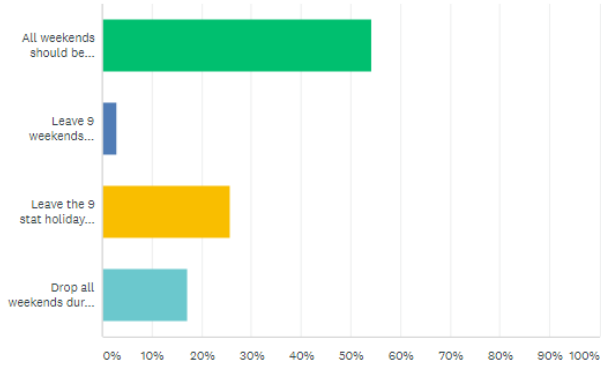


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes	73.81% 31
▼ No	26.19% 11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>

**Figure 10**

At present there are 43 confirmed dentists available for the on-call service. That means there could be up to 9 weekends uncovered per year. How do you feel weekend coverage should proceed?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ All weekends should be covered. Some dentists will have to do 2 weekends per year.	54.29% 19
▼ Leave 9 weekends uncovered per year randomly.	2.86% 1
▼ Leave the 9 stat holiday weekends uncovered per year.	25.71% 9
▼ Drop all weekends during July and August (9 weekends in 2019).	17.14% 6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>