



## **Dental Assistant**

### **Work Activities/Work Locations:**

- Dental assistants work under the direct supervision of a dentist.
- The tasks that a dental assistant perform are the most varied in the dental office.
- They perform a variety of duties including: chair-side assisting, dental office procedures, and dental radiography.
- The chair-side dental assistant assists the dentist during patient care. Duties in this role may include, but are not limited to: preparing patients for treatment, operatory maintenance, oral evacuation, identification and transfer of dental instruments, matrix band assembly, anesthetic syringe assembly, fluoride application, exposure and processing of radiographs, and mixing dental materials.
- In the role of receptionist/office assistant, duties may include recall systems, appointment scheduling, filing, maintaining patient records, dental insurance, financial arrangements and collection, and answering telephones.
- Dental assistants work primarily in general dental offices, dental schools, state and local departments, or specialty dental offices. There is some opportunity to work in dental labs, hospitals and insurance companies.

### **Advantages & Disadvantages:**

- Dental assistants like working with people.
- Attributes should include being neat, well-groomed in appearance, be conscientious in work habits, and have good interpersonal skills.
- They do not like the risk of contracting contagious diseases.

### **Method of Entry:**

- Dental Assistants usually graduate from a technical college program.
- The National Association of Dental Assistants certifies individuals who pass their examination.
- Individuals who complete a dental assistant program accredited by the Commission of Dental Accreditation are eligible to take the Dental Assisting National Boards (DANB) and become a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA).
- This certification is very important to employment and advancement.
- Most states regulate the duties that dental assistants are allowed to perform through licensure or registration.
- Many states require continuing education to maintain licensure or registration.
- A few states allow dental assistants to perform any function delegated to them by the dentist.

- Individual states have adopted different standards for dental assistants who perform certain advanced duties, such as radiological procedures.
- Recertification is offered annually for applicants who have earned continuing education credits.

### **Helpful High School Courses & Experiences:**

- Students should take a general high school curriculum that meets graduation requirements and choose electives directly related to this career.
- Helpful high school courses would include accounting, advanced accounting, biology, chemistry, health, office practices, advanced computer applications, computer applications, and medical terminology.

### **Education & Training:**

- Some dental assistants learn their skills on the job.
- Formal programs are offered at technical colleges, community and junior colleges, or trade schools.
- A high school diploma or equivalent is required for admission.
- In addition, some schools require that students complete high school science courses and take college entrance exams.
- It is highly recommended that individuals check with the school for specific admission requirements.
- Programs include classroom, laboratory, and preclinical instruction in dental-assisting skills and related theory.
- Most programs take 1 year or less to complete and lead to a certificate or diploma.
- Two-year programs offered in community and junior colleges lead to an associate degree.
- A number of private vocational schools offer 4 to 6 month courses in dental assisting, but the Commission on Dental Accreditation does not accredit these programs.
- Milwaukee Area Technical College (MACT) offers a one-semester plus two-week, 16-credit technical diploma program. Courses in the curriculum combine academic and laboratory competencies. A 128 hour clinical experience teaches techniques. Prerequisite for this clinical experience is a certificate in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

### **Advancement Opportunities:**

- Advancement is often limited to salary increases in small offices.
- Without further education, advancement opportunities are limited.
- Some dental assistants become office managers or dental-assisting instructors.
- Others go back to school to become dental hygienists.

- For many, this entry-level occupational provides basic training and experience and serves as a stepping stone to more highly skilled and higher paying jobs.
- In larger offices, however, they may specialize in laboratory work or become office supervisors.
- Some assistants become sales representatives for dental supply manufactures.

**Salary:**

- Typical Salary Range (Wisconsin): \$20,443 to \$31,388 per year.
- Typical Salary Range (National): \$18,835 to \$36,116 per year.

**Hours:**

- Dental assistants usually work 35 to 40 hours a week.
- They can work part-time or full time.

**Employment Information (Wisconsin):**

- Number Employed in 2000: 5,780
- Expected Employment in 2010: 7,740
- Percent Employment Growth (2000-2010): 34%
- Expected Annual Openings: 300

**Educational Institutions:**

- Blackhawk Technical College
- Chippewa Valley Technical College
- Fox Valley Technical College
- Gateway Technical College
- Lakeshore Technical College
- Madison Area Technical College
- Milwaukee Area Technical College
- Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
- Southwest Wisconsin Technical College
- Waukesha County Technical College
- Western Technical College

**Professional Organizations & Additional Information:**

- See Wisconsin Health Careers Website: [www.wihealthcareers.org](http://www.wihealthcareers.org)