Dental Hygienist

Overview
Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals who have graduated from an accredited dental hygiene program in an institution of higher education, licensed in dental hygiene to provide educational, clinical, research, administrative, and therapeutic services supporting total health through the promotion of optimum oral health.

In performing the dental hygiene process of care, the dental hygienist educates patients regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral care; assesses the patient’s oral tissues and overall health determining the presence or absence of disease, other abnormalities and disease risks; develops a dental hygiene diagnosis based on clinical findings; formulates evidence-based, patient-centered treatment care plans; performs the clinical procedures outlined in the treatment care plan; and evaluates the outcomes of educational strategies and clinical procedures provided.

Clinical procedures provided typically include removal of plaque, calculus, and stains from the teeth, exposing and processing dental X-rays, applying cavity-preventive agents, such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants, and administering antimicrobial agents. In some states, they also administer local anesthetics and nitrous oxide; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; perform root-planing as a periodontal therapy; and smooth and polish restorations. In addition, they can prepare clinical and laboratory diagnostic tests for interpretation by other health professionals.

To learn more, watch the video profile of "Dental Hygienists" and hear why ADEA Video Mentors decided to pursue careers in allied dentistry.

Working Conditions
Dental hygienists provide clinical services in a variety of settings such as private dental practice, community health settings, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, schools, faculty practice clinics, state and federal government facilities, and Indian reservations. In addition to clinical practice, there are career opportunities in education, research, sales and marketing, public health, administration and government. Some hygienists combine positions in different settings and career paths for professional variety. Working in education and clinical practice is an example.

Flexible scheduling can be a feature of this profession, with some hygienists working full-time, others part-time.

Academic Requirements
Dental hygienists must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene program based in an institution of higher education. Hygienists must also be licensed in the state in which
they practice. Requirements for licensure vary from state to state, but generally include successful completion of an accredited entry-level program, successful completion of the written National Dental Hygiene Board examination, a state or regional clinical examination, and a state jurisprudence and ethics examination.

Almost all accredited dental hygiene programs minimally offer an Associate in Science or an Associate in Applied Science degree for graduates of a two-year college. Applicants to a two-year associate degree granting institution usually complete mandatory pre-requisite coursework prior to beginning the dental hygiene program. Graduates of a four-year college or university are granted a baccalaureate degree in dental hygiene. Search for schools that provide training for this career.

Dental hygienists holding an associate degree have opportunities to pursue a baccalaureate degree through degree completion programs specifically designed to advance their education. Many of these programs are offered in either full-time or part-time options and have online or distance education opportunities. Dental hygienists who have completed a baccalaureate degree can pursue a graduate degree in dental hygiene or related discipline. Dental hygienists with advanced degrees have broader opportunities for alternative careers within dentistry, dental education and health care delivery.

**Professional Associations**
- American Dental Hygienists' Association
- American Dental Education Association
- Hispanic Dental Association
- National Dental Hygienists' Association

**Funding Opportunities**
Search for funding opportunities in this field

**Enrichment Programs**
Search for enrichment programs in this field

**Schools and Academic Programs**
Search for academic degree and certificate programs in this field

**Source**
www.adea.org

**Learn more about this field:**
Dentistry

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