

FAQ PAGE

What Do Dental Assistants Actually Do?

Dental assistants are literally the glue that keeps the dental office functioning. Their valuable support roles help dentists and dental hygienists focus their attention on the patient's immediate needs. The dental assistant's responsibilities are necessary for the entire office to function smoothly, and successfully.

One of the more common tasks associated with this position is preparing patients for treatment. The dental assistant performs the important duty of ensuring that all dental instruments are kept sterilized, in proper working order and that they are laid out accordingly before the patient arrives. Other crucial duties include processing radiographs (x-rays) that are taken in the office and making sure that these are placed with other pertinent patient information, providing the dentist/front-office staff with a complete record of the patient's health status.

Dental assistants may also remove sutures, apply topical anesthetics to gums or cavity-preventive agents to teeth, remove excess cement used in the filling process and place dental dams to isolate teeth for treatment. Many states are expanding dental assistants' duties to include tasks such as coronal polishing and restorative dentistry functions for those assistants who meet specific training and experience requirements.

Dental assistants with laboratory duties make casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions, clean and polish removable appliances and make temporary crowns. Those with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive payments and order dental supplies and materials.

A dental assistant is commonly asked to prepare materials for temporary fillings and perform other tasks under the direction of the dentist or hygienist. They may be present during dental procedures and, if so, will often be asked to retract or suction an area so the dental operator has a clear field of vision while performing a patient's treatment. The dental assistant will also hand the necessary tools to the dentist/hygienist during the actual procedure, allowing more attention to be focused on the patient. Finally, it is not uncommon for the dental assistant to perform charting responsibilities once a procedure is completed or after a dentist renders a diagnosis.

As you can imagine, dental assistants are critical for a dental office to run smoothly, and they can substantially streamline an office's efficiency while ensuring that the patient experiences a successful and pleasant visit.

Can I Find A Job As A Dental Assistant?

Here in Utah, we are fortunate to have an economy that is well under the national average for unemployment, so dental assisting careers are more available here than elsewhere. Recent studies done by the Utah Department of Workforce Services and the U.S Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics show that overall there are real employment opportunities for dental assistants. Furthermore, a recent U.S. Department

of Labor study shows: “Job prospects for dental assistants should be excellent. In addition to job openings due to employment growth, numerous job openings will arise out of the need to replace assistants who transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave for other reasons.”

Similarly, the Utah Department of Workforce Services May/June 2010 Update showed that dental assisting jobs were among the fastest growing occupations in percentage growth for employment projected from 2008 through 2018. It should be noted that growth for dental assisting jobs ranked above computer software engineers, medical assistants and veterinary techs, and *nearly* as high as dental hygienist jobs!

For more info: <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/trendlines/mayjune10/nationalnews.pdf>

How Much Do Dental Assistants Earn?

Once they have received the required certifications, dental assistants in Utah can expect to earn good money upon graduation, with great potential for wage increases.

According to the national average, statistics found in the 2010/2011 edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook (published by the U.S. Department of Labor) showed that dental assistants earned median annual wages of \$32,380 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between \$26,980 and \$38,960. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,270, while the highest 10 percent earned more than \$46,150. Medical and dental benefits are often available as well, but vary substantially by practice setting and may be contingent upon full-time employment.

For more info: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos163.htm>

Here in Utah, the Department of Workforce Services shows that dental assistants make the following hourly wages: Inexperienced: \$10.11/hour; Average experience: \$13.45/hour and the middle range between \$11.23 to \$15.54/hour. This makes the Utah median range around \$13.55/hour for well-trained dental assistants.

What Type Of Environment Do Dental Assistants Work In?

Dental assistants work in a very comfortable environment. It is always indoors, so there are never worries about it being too hot or too cold, or about being snowed and rained upon. Dental assistants generally work in clean, well-lit and ventilated dental offices and labs.

Their work area is usually near the dental chair, allowing them to easily arrange instruments, materials and medication; they then hand these items to the dentist or hygienist as needed. Dental assistants must wear gloves, masks, eyewear and protective clothing to protect themselves and their patients from the rare risk of infectious diseases.

Dental assistants do have contact with the public and are not always performing the same duty constantly, day in and day out. They spend a fair amount of time sitting down and working at their work stations, essentially enjoying the same professional and relaxed atmosphere as a dentist.

According to the most recent U.S. Department of Labor statistics on this field, more than half of all dental assistants had a 35 to 40 hour work week. More than one-third worked part time, or less than 35 hours per week, and many others have variable schedules. Depending on the hours of the dental office where they work, assistants may have to work on Saturdays or evenings.

What Are Skills I Need To Become A Successful Dental Assistant?

Besides the required certifications there are many basic skills that one needs in order to succeed in this position. Among them are meeting deadlines and the ability to handle multiple tasks both quickly and efficiently.

Obviously, working with people – an enjoying it – is critical, as there is interaction with the dentist, members of the office staff, as well as the various personalities one can expect to meet as patients in the dental office.

Dental assistants need to be proficient with computers and have a good working knowledge of the popular Dentrix platforms, as Dentrix is the leader in dental computer software.

Candidates that possess a good work ethic, pay attention to detail and show a demonstrated patience, as well as ability to use their problem-solving skills, are ideal for this type of career. If these talents come naturally to you, then contact The Core Foundation so that we can help you hone your skills and find a dental assisting job quickly!

How Do I Become A Dental Assistant in Utah?

Utah is one of the few states that does not have an official and “all encompassing” state certification policy for becoming a dental assistant. Dental assistants in Utah only need to pass a radiology exam approved by the Utah Board that meets the criteria established in Section R156-69-604. All dental assistants must also currently have either Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) or Basic Cardiac Life Support (BCLS) certification. It is important to note, however, that tuition rates for these certification programs differ dramatically, and here is the reason:

All accredited and non-accredited dental assisting programs offer these required certifications (CPR and radiology), but at widely different tuition pricing. At Salt Lake Community College of Applied Technology the tuition cost is \$16,000. At Vista, the program would cost \$14,000. This is because at these locations credits are transferable towards earning one’s Registered

Dental Hygienist (RDH) degree—a field that is far more school intensive, as well as being highly competitive. Some Utah colleges do not have open slots for their dental hygienist programs until 2013 and if they do, there are very few openings into the program.

But, if you are looking to become an excellent dental assistant, The Core Foundation offers the very same certifications in an accelerated course for \$4,000; the only difference is that our credits will not roll over towards a student’s RDH degree. In addition, because we are also a fully-functioning dental and specialty surgical facility, with three separate companies in two locations, we can better provide our students with the critical skills and experience that is often lacking in more expensive educations. This information could very well save you a tremendous amount of money if you’re looking to become a dental assistant or dental administrator.

Importantly, our teachers and staff here at The Core Foundation offer more than just the certifications necessary to begin your new career. We are committed to creating a new realm of possibility for you in your daily life. We believe that learning how to live an empowered life, in addition to a comprehensive skill-based education, will create successful, positive, and valuable members of society. Our curriculum includes a three-day seminar that will assist you in: taking personal ownership and pride in your work; adding value to yourself

and those around you; establishing personal relationships with patients; building confidence and creating positive outcomes in your life.

The reason we began The Core Foundation was to better prepare our graduates for achieving success more quickly and with greater integrity upon program completion, thus raising the bar and truly setting the industry standard for exceptional dental assistants and powerful human beings.

Conclusion:

We are committed to our students receiving extraordinary results from our program and will do everything we can to ensure that our graduates enjoy success. Come visit The Core Foundation's friendly staff during one of our weekly open houses at our campus, located at 530 East 500 South in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The open house includes a brief tour of our facility, followed by a question and answer period. It begins promptly at 4:30pm each and every Wednesday. We look forward to being your resource as you begin the career you've always wanted!

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