Hospital dental services

Hospital dental practice is highly specialised and covers oral and maxillofacial surgery, oral surgery, orthodontics, paediatric dentistry, and restorative dentistry.

Hospitals do not provide a dental service to the general public, except in the special case of dental hospitals where large numbers of patients are required for teaching purposes.

The hospital dental service has four main functions:

- consultant advice and treatment for cases of special difficulty referred to hospitals by general dental and medical practitioners, or for patients admitted to hospital as a result of trauma or disease
- dental care, including comprehensive treatment, of long-stay hospital in-patients
- dental care of short-stay patients when this is required for pain relief or other emergency, or as part of, or in support of their general treatment
- the treatment of certain out-patients, where there are medical considerations which make it desirable for the treatment to be carried out in a hospital

Find out more about the highly specialised dental treatment provided in hospitals.

Oral and maxillofacial surgery

Oral and maxillofacial surgery [1] deals with a variety of conditions associated with the mouth, jaws, face and neck. To become a consultant in oral and maxillofacial surgery, you need to be qualified in both medicine [2] and dentistry [3]. The combined medical, dental and surgical training reflects the broad nature of the work undertaken by oral and maxillofacial surgeons.

Oral and maxillofacial surgery involves an extensive array of procedures – everything from relatively minor procedures to complex major head and neck surgery. Oral and maxillofacial surgery as a medical specialty is unique because it entails operating on both hard and soft tissue and there is a strong emphasis on reconstruction, including microvascular [4] techniques.

If you like the idea of working in a specialty with considerable clinical challenges, oral and maxillofacial surgery could be the one for you. It is important to note that the training process for this specialty is particularly long.

Oral surgery
Oral surgery deals with the treatment and ongoing management of irregularities and pathology of the jaw and mouth that require surgical intervention.

Surgically removing teeth is the most common procedure that oral surgeons perform, but oral surgery as a specialty has a broad scope. This includes managing hard and soft tissue pathology, oral infections, dentoalveolar trauma and oro-facial pain, along with performing operations to support orthodontics and insertion of osseointegrated implants.

There is a degree of overlap with oral and maxillofacial surgery, but oral surgery is a dental specialty and there is no requirement to hold a medical degree.

Much oral surgery is provided within hospitals but care is increasingly being provided outside the hospital environment such as in general dental practices.

Formal specialist training in oral surgery takes three years full time.

**Orthodontics**

Orthodontics is the branch of dentistry concerned with the growth of the face, the development of teeth and jaws and the correction and prevention of abnormalities.

Of all of the dental specialties, orthodontics has the longest established pattern of structured training with approved programmes across the UK. Orthodontics has a strong hospital-based consultant service which concentrates on treating the more severe abnormalities. That said, orthodontic specialty practice in the high street is well developed.

**Paediatric dentistry**

Paediatric dentistry aims to improve the oral healthcare of infants, children and adolescents through preventive, educational and treatment services. Paediatric dentistry involves a broad range of work which requires a skilled combination of medical, dental and communication skills training. If you choose this area of dentistry, you will likely treat children with facial and dental anomalies, or who have been involved in dentoalveolar trauma, have varying special needs and are fearful or resistant to dental care.

Training encompasses many aspects of general dentistry alongside developing specialist skills in caring for children of all ages.

Paediatric dentistry provides opportunities for teaching and research into the comprehensive and therapeutic oral health care for children from birth to adolescence. And, as a paediatric dentist, you can specialise in oral medicine, oral pathology, dental and maxillofacial radiology, and oral microbiology.

**Restorative dentistry**

In restorative dentistry, dentists care for patients with complex problems to restore their dental function. Many patients have particular needs with congenital or acquired facial defects, medical problems or learning difficulties that have implications for their care.

To work in restorative dentistry, you need to be able to manage patients with special clinical needs, using a combination of advanced surgical, non-surgical and clinical skills. You’ll also need technical skills to fix and remove dental prostheses and work with implant technology. Care involves balancing the value of technical expertise against the particular needs of patients in a constantly changing research arena.

It is now possible to train in the specialties of endodontics, periodontics or prosthodontics. Once you’ve completed the relevant training programme, you can be added to the General Dental Council’s appropriate specialist list.