Dentist

Dentists work with patients and the general public to prevent and treat dental and oral disease, correcting dental irregularities (particularly in children) and treating dental and facial injuries.

Working life

Dentists lead the dental team and have the skills and confidence to diagnose and treat problems and provide good advice to patients, as well as high levels of manual dexterity to carry out intricate surgical and dental procedures.

They have excellent knowledge of human anatomy and oral diseases, as well as first-class clinical skills.

Dentists’ work is increasingly preventive, protecting teeth and gums from decay and disease. Most dentists work as general practitioners and patients come from their local community.
Dentists also work in:

- **general dental care**
- **community dental care**
- **dental public health**
- **hospital dental care**
- **armed forces dentists**

**General dental care**

Most dentists work as general dental practitioners (GDPs), usually in a high street practice, providing dental care to the general public. GDPs can largely choose where they work and may need to be flexible with their working hours.

GDPs may practise either under the NHS or privately, but most do both. Charges for NHS dental treatment are set at a flat rate, depending on what type of treatment the patient requires.

However, private charges are set by individual dentists and so vary between practices.

Dentists have excellent knowledge of human anatomy and oral diseases.

GDPs can also work part time in hospitals and some go into clinical teaching.

**Community dental care**

Dental care is provided in community settings for patients who have difficulty getting treatment in their high street dental practice and who require treatment on a referral basis, which is not available in a general dental care setting.

For example, community dentists look after young children who need special help, as well as elderly and housebound people and people with severe physical disabilities or mental illness. This work can be demanding and rewarding and community dentists can often be provided with opportunities to take on managerial and research duties. They can also be involved in school screening work and in epidemiological studies of oral health.

Community dentists work in a variety of locations such as a patient's own home, nursing homes, community clinics and mobile clinics. They work with a wider clinical team including health professionals such as school nurses[^1], health visitors[^2] and district nurses[^3].

**Dental public health**

Dental public health is a specialty which involves assessing dental health needs and ensuring dental services meet those needs. Public health dentists work to improve the dental health of populations rather than individuals.

The specialty involves working with people from all branches of dentistry as well as the NHS and other agencies. Find out more about [public health](#).
Hospital dental care

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

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.

Hospital practice is highly specialised and covers:

- oral and maxillofacial surgery
- oral surgery
- orthodontics
- paediatric dentistry
- restorative dentistry

Visit our hospital dental services page to find out more.

Hospital dentists tend to see fewer patients than general dental practitioners, but their treatment is usually more complex. For example, patients may have complex medical conditions, congenital abnormalities, complex facial injuries or oral facial disease.

They generally work as part of a team and have access to specialised knowledge and facilities.

Within the hospital service there is a defined career structure and training pathway, and advancement requires obtaining recognised postgraduate qualifications. Dentists employed in hospitals have the same terms and conditions of service as hospital doctors.

Armed forces dentists

Another option for graduates in dentistry is to join the armed forces as a dental officer. You have the option of joining the Army, Royal Navy or Royal Air Force but it is likely you will be required to treat personnel from all three services as integration of medical and dental services is increasing.

You will receive full officer training and be required to commit for a minimum period of around six years. However, the salary (and benefits) can be substantial and sometimes grants are available to help pay for university costs if you are accepted before graduation.

Military life is not for everyone, but you will have access to the latest equipment and be able to treat patients in a salaried setting, whilst benefiting from substantially longer appointment
times than in a typical NHS practice. You will need to be flexible with location and can expect to move several times, both nationally and abroad. For those with a sense of adventure, this could prove very attractive indeed. Perhaps the most important factor to take into account is that as a dental office in the armed forces, you are always a military officer first and a dental officer second.

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the entry requirements, skills and interests needed for dentistry [6]
- Pay and conditions

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Most NHS dentists working in dental practices are self-employed contractors. The profit of dental practices varies according to the services they provide for their patients and the way they choose to provide these services.

    Find out more about the pay for dentists [7]

- Job market and vacancies

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For dentist jobs in community clinics and hospitals, the NHS Jobs website [8] is the place to look. For general practice jobs, professional journals such as the British Dental Journal usually have an extensive list of jobs to apply for.

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

    Find out more about NHS values. [9]

- Further information

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    ○ British Dental Association [10]
    ○ General Dental Council [11]
    ○ Faculty of Dental Surgery – Edinburgh [12]
    ○ Faculty of Dental Surgery – England [13]

Other roles that may interest you

- Experienced paramedic [14]
- Emergency care assistant [15]
• Health records staff [16]
• Patient Transport Service PTS call handler [17]

Source URL: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dentist

Links
[8] https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/
[10] https://www.bda.org/