

Dentist

Dentists are the frontline of good oral health. They work with communities to prevent and treat dental/oral disease, correct dental irregularities and treat dental/facial injuries.



Working life

You'll lead the dental team using the the skills and confidence gained through world-class training to diagnose and treat dental problems. You'll provide advice to patients and use high levels of manual dexterity to carry out complex surgical and dental procedures.

Your training will lead to an excellent knowledge of human anatomy and oral disease while giving you the best clinical skills to help your patients.

Manoj Kumar

Senior dental officer (dental surgeon)

Relieving a patient's pain and providing them with the best possible dental care and advice is a fantastic feeling.

[Read Manoj's story](#) ^[1]

Your work is increasingly about, protecting teeth and preventing gums from decay and disease. You're likely to work in your local community but you'll also have the chance to work in a variety of areas:

- [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. You can largely choose where you work but you may need to be flexible with your working hours.

You may practise either under the NHS or privately, or both. You could 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.

You might be looking after young children who need special help, as well as elderly and people who are housebound or with severe physical disabilities or mental illness. This can be demanding and rewarding work. You might be able to balance this work managerial and research duties. You can also be involved in working with schools doing screening and in studies of oral health.

You'll work in a variety of locations such as a patient's own home, nursing homes, community clinics and mobile clinics. You'll also work with a wider clinical team including school nurses [2], health visitors [3] and district nurses [4].

Dentists have excellent knowledge of human anatomy and oral diseases.

Dental public health

Dental public health is a specialty which involves assessing dental health needs and ensuring dental services meet those needs. Your work will look to improve the dental health of communities rather than individuals.

Hospital dental care

Being a dentist in a hospital usually means working in the following areas:

- offering consultant advice and treatment for cases referred to hospitals or for patients admitted to hospital as a result of trauma or disease
- dental care and treatment for patients in hospital for a long time
- dental care for patients in hospital for a shorter period where pain relief of treatment is needed as part of their general care
- treatment of out-patients

Working in a specialist dental hospital covers:

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

You'll likely to see fewer patients than general dental practitioners, but treatment is usually more complex. You'll generally work as part of a team and have access to specialised knowledge and facilities.

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.

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.

You'll have access to the latest equipment and appointment times are usually longer than in a typical NHS practice. You'll need to be flexible with location and can expect to move several times, both in the UK and abroad. 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.

Pay and benefits

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.](#) ^[5]

Entry requirements

Becoming a dentist involves at least five years' study at dental school, followed by one or two years of supervised practice. Most entrants will require three As at A-level, although one year pre-dental courses are offered by some dental schools.

Must-have skills

You'll need a willingness to learn about human anatomy and oral disease.

You'll need to be able to put patients at ease, gain their confidence and deal sympathetically with their fears. You will hold a position of trust, so you will need to behave with integrity, tact and understanding. You will need to be able to communicate well with everyone from toddlers to the elderly.

It's also important for you to be able to lead your team effectively, so good managerial and administrative skills are essential.

How to become a dentist

Becoming a dentist comprises three stages:

- [undergraduate dental education](#)

- [postgraduate dental training](#)
- [continuing professional development](#)

Undergraduate dental education

To qualify as a dentist you must complete five years' training for a degree at university. You will spend much of the five years learning practical skills as well as attending academic lectures and seminars. You will get experience of a range of hospital and community clinics where you will treat patients under close supervision.

Financial support while studying at university

[Find out about financial support while studying dentistry at university](#) ^[6]

Postgraduate dental training

This comprises [dental foundation training](#), [dental core training](#) and [specialist training](#). ^[7]

Continuing professional development

Once you have successfully completed your undergraduate dental education, you will need to register with the General Dental Council (GDC) so that you can practise as a qualified dentist. As soon as you have registered with the GDC and throughout your career, you will need to undertake continuing professional development to be allowed to continue to practise. Throughout your career, scientific knowledge will need to be updated as methods and theories of disease change.

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- [Dental technician/dental technologist](#) ^[9]
- [Dental therapist](#) ^[10]
- [Dental hygienist](#) ^[11]

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