Dental nurse

A dental nurse supports the dentist in all aspects of patients’ dental care.

Working life

As a dental nurse, you may help with reception work and could help any member of the dental team - dentists, clinical dental technicians/technologists, hygienists and therapists – treat patients of all ages.

Some will be there for a check-up while others will have more complicated treatment. You’ll need to reassure people and put them at ease, while supporting the team in all aspects of patient care.

In a dental practice you will welcome patients and provide direct support with the treatment itself:

- taking responsibility for the decontamination of instruments
- maintaining dental operating equipment
- ensuring that all relevant materials and supplies are in place
- looking after patient records – including making notes when the dentist is examining a patient
- working closely with the dentist[1], responding quickly to requests and generally keeping the surgery ready for use

You will also be responsible for ensuring high standards of cleanliness and control of infection. With extra training you could take x-rays and clinical photographs, take impressions, make models of teeth and apply fluoride varnish to prevent tooth decay.

You may also help with reception work. Tact and discretion are important qualities for a dental
nurse - you will be handling confidential patient information and caring for people who may be anxious.

Entry requirements

You can usually work as a trainee dental nurse without academic qualifications but, to progress to being a qualified dental nurse, you will need to study for a course in dental nursing, either part or full time, that is approved by the General Dental Council [2]. Exact course requirements will vary from provider to provider, but a minimum 2 GCSEs (C grade or above) in English language and maths or a science subject are usually required for part-time courses.

You'll need to reassure people and put them at ease.

Full-time degree level courses may require A-levels or equivalent level 3 qualifications. Check our course finder [3] for available courses and always check with individual course providers about their specific entry requirements.

A level 3 apprenticeship in dental nursing is an additional way to gain the required qualifications in dental nursing. For details of where to search for job and apprenticeship vacancies, see the 'Job market and vacancies' section below.

You must be happy to work as part of a team and willing to learn and understand the science behind dentistry. You’ll be dealing with a broad range of people, each with their own characteristics and concerns so you’ll need to be tactful and friendly and able to offer advice and educate others. You will often need to follow instructions from the dentist.

- Pay and conditions
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Most dental nurses in the NHS work standard hours, which are likely to be around 37.5 a week. They may work some evenings.

Your starting salary will usually be between band 2 and band 4 of the Agenda for Change [4] pay rates but some senior dental nurses will start at band 5 or higher. Find out more about pay for the dental team in the NHS [5].

Terms and conditions may vary for those dental nurses not directly employed by the NHS.

- Where the role can lead
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Experience as a dental nurse is usually a requirement for those wishing to become a dental hygienist [8] or dental therapist [7].

With experience and further training, dental nurses can also work as orthodontic therapists. Dental nurses can acquire additional skills such as impression-taking and providing fluoride varnish as part of dental public health programmes.

- Job market and vacancies

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Dental nurses are always in demand, meaning that employment prospects are good. Diligent dental nurses can expect excellent job security.

Most NHS trusts advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs [8] and some advertise on trust websites. Apprenticeship vacancies are also advertised on the Gov.uk website [9].

You can find a list of trusts on the NHS Choices website [10]. General dental practice vacancies are advertised in trade magazines as well as through specialist recruitment agencies.

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 [11].

- Further information

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- British Association of Dental Nurses [12]
- National Examining Board for Dental Nurses [13]
- General Dental Council [2]

Other roles that may interest you

- Dental support worker [14]
- Receptionist [15]
- Experienced paramedic [16]
- Emergency care assistant [17]

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

Links