Dental therapist

You will do much of the straightforward work that a dentist is able to do without the need for a referral from a dentist.

Working life

More dentists are adding dental therapists to the practice team to handle much of the routine dental work. Working as a therapist in a dental practice gives you independence without the full responsibility of running a practice. Many dental therapists provide treatment in a range of places in the community, such as schools and care homes.

Dental therapists are increasingly important members of the dental team and are likely to be a particularly important component of future NHS dental care.

Health education is an important part of the role and the dental therapist is responsible for carrying out a range of procedures, including:
- intra and extra oral assessment
- scaling and polishing
- applying materials to teeth such as fluoride and fissure sealants
- taking dental radiographs
- providing dental health education on a one-to-one basis or in a group situation
- undertaking routine restorations in both deciduous (previously known as baby teeth) teeth and permanent teeth, on adults and children
- using all materials except pre cast or pinned placements
- extracting deciduous (baby) teeth under local infiltration analgesia

Provided they have completed appropriate training, dental therapists can perform extended duties such as:

Dental therapists may treat patients who have high treatment needs.

- undertaking the pulp therapy treatment of deciduous teeth (formerly known as baby teeth)
- placing pre-formed crowns on deciduous teeth
- administering inferior dental nerve block analgesia under the supervision of a dentist
- providing emergency temporary replacement of crowns and fillings
- taking impressions
- treating patients under conscious sedation provided the dentist remains in the surgery throughout the treatment

The dental therapist may treat a wide range of patients who have high treatment needs, such as those who:

- are dentally anxious
- are medically compromised
- are physically disabled
- have learning disabilities
- have high levels of untreated decay
- are unable to access regular dental care in the general dental service

**Entry requirements, skills and interests**

To practise as a dental therapist, you must obtain a diploma or degree in dental therapy and be registered on the General Dental Council's [1] (CDG) roll of dental therapists.

To get on the course, you will need five GCSE subjects at grade A to C, plus two A-levels or a recognised qualification in dental nursing. You may also be required to have some experience of dental nursing before taking the course.

Dental therapists carry out a range of clinical tasks and will often spend valuable time encouraging anxious patients to accept dental treatment. This requires patience, and excellent communication and interpersonal skills. An empathetic and caring approach is very important, in addition to proficient, highly technical clinical skills. You will need to be confident
to work on your own and be able to put even the youngest of patients at ease. Much of your work is likely to be with children, older people and those with special needs.

Good time management and organisational skills are essential, along with attention to health and safety procedures. At all times, a dental therapist needs to be mindful of the need for patient confidentiality.

Training and development

The diploma in dental therapy course takes about 27 months, depending on the dental hospital at which you study. Some dental schools offer part time courses for dental hygienists wishing to qualify as dental therapists.

Subjects studied include:

- preventive dentistry
- dental health education
- dental pathology
- simple restorative procedures for both deciduous and permanent teeth
- the extraction of deciduous teeth (previously known as baby teeth)
- radiography and pharmacology

Use our course finder [2] to search for courses in dental therapy leading to registration with the GDC.

- Pay and conditions
  
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  Find out more on our Pay for the dental team in the NHS [3] page.

- Where the role can lead
  
  Expand / collapse

  Dental therapists are expected to keep up to date with the latest techniques and developments, including best practice.

  Continuing professional development, identified through individual performance reviews, will form part of the mandatory requirements for annual registration on with the General Dental Council’s roll of dental therapists.

  Dental therapists with experience can progress to become practice managers or move into research work. They can also move into teaching roles or progress to working as orthodontic therapists.

- Job market and vacancies
  
  Expand / collapse

  Vacancies for NHS dental therapists are advertised on NHS Jobs [4].
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.

Find out more about NHS values. [5]

- Further information

Expand / collapse

- British Association of Dental Therapists [6]
- British Dental Association [7]
- British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy [8]
- General Dental Council [9]

Other roles that may interest you

- Experienced paramedic [10]
- Health records staff [12]
- Clerk [13]

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

Links