

Miss Woods's Career of the Month – September – Dentistry

Have you ever thought about becoming a dentist? The term 'dentist' first appeared in the 18th Century. Throughout history, people have needed to keep their teeth in good condition, and although different diets mean different dental problems, no one wants to be living with a toothache! Historically, dental techniques have been very varied (such as the Egyptians wearing an amulet to ward off toothache, or the Romans finding a frog by moonlight and asking it to take the ache away!) but today, modern dentistry is able to take advantage of technological and medical advances, to ensure patients are able to receive the very best of care.



Dentists educate people on how to care for their teeth and mouth, and provide treatment for any issues or problems which may occur. Generally, a dentist will check teeth in children and adults for any problems, and provide treatments if necessary. They may also refer people onto specialists, and some will train and specialise in specific areas, such as orthodontics.

Different roles within dentistry:

- Dentist
- Dental hygienist
- Dental nurse
- Dental technician/technologist
- Dental therapist

A dentist is the person who is qualified to treat diseases and other conditions of the mouth, as well as correcting any irregularities, as well as routine check-ups to make sure there are no problems with their patients.

A dental hygienist is someone who shows adults, and sometimes children, how to best look after their teeth and gums. A hygienist may carry out scaling procedures, polishing and apply treatments such as fluoride.

A dental nurse may help with reception, or any other member of the dental team, providing valuable help and support. They will also be responsible for keeping the surgery ready for use and making sure equipment is decontaminated and safe to use.

Dental technicians and technologists make things such as dentures, crowns, bridges and dental braces, which can help to improve speech, the ability to chew, appearance and general quality of life for people. They work to exact specifications and must have a great eye for detail and precision.

Dental therapists do lots of routine dental work, and lots provide treatment in a range of places, such as schools and care homes. It is thought that dental therapists will be an important part of the future of NHS dental care.



It is competitive to get into dentistry and onto a dentistry degree. You will need very good GCSE grades, as well as AAA-ABB at A-level in chemistry, biology and one other subject. If your A-level grades don't quite meet the required standard, it may be possible for you to find a pre-dental course at University for one additional year, before being able to progress onto the dentistry degree. When applying you will need to make sure you have relevant work experience as well – usually at least two weeks' worth. Some dental practices will happily accept work experience students; others may not be able to due to their insurance. It is advisable to try and arrange a placement as soon as possible, and the best way to do that is to pick up the phone or visit the practices you would like to do your work experience at.

In addition to the right degree, training and further qualifications, it is also important that anyone who is interested in a career in dentistry has the right skills – in addition to the medical knowledge needed. Being able to provide good customer service, having good hand-eye coordination, paying close attention to detail, being a good communicator and having the ability to work well with your hands are all vitally important as well.



At present, the only apprenticeship available in dentistry is the dental nursing apprenticeship – this is where you work full time, as well as studying for a further qualification. You will get paid and have the same rights as any other employee – that includes sick pay and holiday pay.

Most dentists will go on to specialise when they have completed their degree and year of postgraduate training. Some may even go on to set up their own practice.

For further information:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dentist>

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/after-gcses/find-career-ideas/explore-jobs/job-profile/dentist>

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/dentist>

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/dentist>