

Dentist

Nature of the Profession

Dentists diagnose, prevent, and treat problems of the teeth and tissues of the mouth. They remove decay and fill cavities, examine x-rays, place protective plastic sealants on children's teeth, straighten teeth, and repair fractured teeth. They also perform corrective surgery of the gums and supporting bones to treat gum diseases. Dentists extract teeth and make molds and measurements for dentures to replace missing teeth.

The majority of dentists work in private practice, either solo or with a dental group. Dentists typically work with dental hygienists and dental assistants, who help provide patient care. Dentists may also work in hospitals, public clinics, teaching institutions, or research facilities.

APTITUDES

- Ability to learn the complex science, math, and the methods and techniques of dentistry
- Strong verbal abilities for effective oral and written communication with the health care team
- Analytical abilities for measuring, calculating and evaluating
- Strong manual dexterity and eye-hand coordination
- Good space and form perception
- Good observational skills and ability to relate to all kinds of people
- Scientific curiosity, emotional maturity, and empathy

EDUCATION

Graduation from an accredited dental school is required, which usually takes four years. To enter a dental school, a person must have three to four years of college study in pre-dentistry, have a high grade point average, and pass the Dental Admissions Test. After graduation, a Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) is awarded. To specialize or teach, a dentist must spend an additional two to four years in advanced dental training. Researchers in dentistry may pursue a master's or doctorate degree.

After the completion of dental school, graduates may enter the practice of general dentistry or pursue advanced training in specialty areas which include:

- Endodontics - root canal and related therapy
- Oral/maxillofacial Surgery - surgery of the mouth and jaws
- Oral pathology - investigating the cause, process and effect of dental disease
- Orthodontics - correction of teeth placement and facial structures
- Pediatric dentistry - for infants through adolescents
- Periodontics - gum and supporting structure treatment
- Prostodontics - treatment with artificial teeth and dentures
- Public health dentistry - preventing and controlling dental disease

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN NEBRASKA

- University of Nebraska Medical Center – Lincoln (D)
- Creighton Health Sciences – Omaha (D)

LICENSURE / CERTIFICATION

An applicant for licensure as a dentist must graduate from an accredited school or college of dentistry and pass the exams.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

American Dental Association

Web Address: www.ada.org

Nebraska Dental Association

Web Address: www.nedental.org