



4. Training

Training of dental assistants is usually conducted in the Vocational Education and Training Sector and according to the National Competencies Standards contained in the health training package. The basic course is usually at Certificate III level although there are additional training modules at the Certificate IV level.

The Dental Assistant Education Council of Australia (DAECA) promotes the national interchange of ideas and knowledge of standards of excellence for dental assistants. DAECA has played a key role in the development of national competency standards for dental assistants. Dental assisting training is provided by institutions or organisations that vary from state to state. Go to www.ada.org.au to find the details of training arrangements in your state and relevant contact details.



www.ada.org.au



public respect team member efficient management
reception sterilising equipment preparing instruments
mixing materials modern technology administration dedication

Dental Assisting

A Challenging and Rewarding Career





Dental Assisting

as a career ✓

1. Introduction

Dental assisting is a challenging and rewarding career suited to those who are interested in working in a healthcare setting.

In an employment marketplace of rapid change, dental assisting has been a stable yet challenging career option. It provides continuing employment in either a full or part-time capacity. It allows one to work within the private or public health sectors, and with either a general practitioner or specialist dentist. Dental assistants enjoy a high level of public respect, as part of a health care team.

The use of modern technology and new concepts in patient care has resulted in improved patient comfort, better dental aesthetics and more efficient treatment. Dentistry is on the cutting edge of modern technology. Dental assistants work closely with the dentists and other members of the dental team in all stages of patient care and as an important member of this team play a key role in the efficient delivery of dental treatment, and contribute to making a trip to the dentist an increasingly positive experience for the community.

2. Your Role

Dental assistants have a diverse role which has three main areas:

2.1 Administration and reception

Dental assistants are often the face and voice of the practice, welcoming patients and attending to their telephone enquiries. As dental assistants almost always have the initial contact with the patient, personality and dedication contribute greatly to the friendly atmosphere where dentistry is practised. A mature manner and good grooming are valuable attributes. Dental assistants being trained in reception, administration and other aspects of patient service have an important role in the seamless running of the practice, which may include telephone assistance with patient enquiries, scheduling of appointments, and maintaining patient records. Important responsibilities may also include liaising with representatives of dental material supply houses for purchase of necessary supplies. The advent of computerisation within dental practices offers contact and knowledge in the information technology area. All the above roles enhance personal assistance skills.

2.2 Chair-side

Beyond the administrative duties dental assistants also have a chair-side role. A caring attitude and a desire for patient interaction are primary prerequisites for a dedicated dental assistant. Dental assistants prepare patients for examination and treatment by the dentist. During patient treatment dental assistants can assist the dentist by such things as the passing of instruments, mixing materials for fillings (and other restorative work), and maintaining a 'dry field' in the patient's mouth during treatment.

'Chair-side' assisting can also be performed in environments other than in dental clinics. Dental assistants can help dentists treat patients in, for

example, hospital operating theatres, mobile clinics and nursing homes.

The application of good communication skills to help patients relax once in the dental chair, and explain treatment and post-treatment care are other things that dental assistants may do that involve them in patient care.

Demonstrating home oral hygiene techniques and helping patients prevent further dental disease is a most rewarding part of dental assisting.

2.3 Preparation

Dental assistants also work 'behind the scenes' cleaning, sterilising and, preparing the dental surgery.

A high level of appropriate infection control to protect patients and dental workers is a very important part of modern dental practice.

Dental assistants play a central role in the infection control in all dental clinical settings.

3. Career Path

Dental assistants, after several years, may use the experience, training and skills they have to pursue careers within or outside dentistry.



3.1 Dental assisting

The National Competencies Standards provide an opportunity for a career path within dental assisting with the introduction of further training modules for dental radiography, oral health education and the provision of assistance during procedures under general anaesthetic and sedation techniques.



3.2 Practice manager

Dental assistants may extend, with experience and extra training, to become practice managers. This management role in dental practices is a new and developing one. Usually dental assistants would undertake further training to become a practice manager. Practice manager is a valuable role that 'frees' dentists to concentrate on clinical practice and may include paying accounts, administration and payment of wages, management of other staff and the clinic's IT system.



3.3 Dental hygienist

Many dental hygienists started their careers in dentistry as dental assistants. In fact, in some of the dental hygiene courses being a dental assistant is a prerequisite for the course. A few dental assistants have undertaken even further training to become dentists.



3.4 Dental sales representative

Dental supply companies often recruit experienced dental assistants as retail sales representatives because of their knowledge of dental equipment and materials and how dental practices operate. Some dental assistants have progressed to have more senior roles within dental supply companies.



3.5 Outside dentistry

Experienced dental assistants have found their training and skills useful, especially when dealing with the public or managing a small business, which enables them to later pursue alternate careers if circumstances so dictate.