

DENTAL ASSISTANT

This is skilled work in rendering technical assistance to dentists or dental students in the care of dental patients. This work is identified in such places as the Department of Correction, the Department of Human Resources, North Carolina Memorial Hospital, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Patient care duties are usually performed in the physical presence of a dentist or dental student, and other procedures are performed using established protocols and office routine. Employees typically have some responsibility for orienting dental and dental assistant students to the full utilization of dental assistants in office management, patient relations, and routine chairside procedures.

Chairside and nonchairside duties include most or all of the following: inventories, receives, checks, and stocks supplies and equipment; cleans and sterilizes instruments; keeps instruments and equipment in operable condition; prepares and arranges instrument trays (some sterile trays) for clinic use; explains procedures and provides support to patients; passes instruments to the dentist during dental procedures; mixes impression and filling material; operates oral evacuation equipment, retractors, and water and air sprays; monitors the patient's behavior and vital signs upon request from the doctor; completes patient's records for operative procedures, charges, and reappointments; clears and cleans the operatory and instruments; takes routine x-rays and photographs such as bite wings; processes and mounts film; instructs patient, family, and/or health care staff in basic oral hygiene; may maintain records and recall system, answer phone, type some records or correspondence.

I. DIFFICULTY OF WORK:

Complexity - Duties are quite varied, but repetitive in similar situations. The employee must be able to proceed independently within established routines, with some special knowledge or skills required if in a specialized area as oral surgery or orthodontics. Typically, the assistant assists the dentist or dental student with a variety of dental procedures, manages the operatory, and performs clerical support duties.

Guidelines - These include established technical procedures, office protocols, and available journals and textbooks. Guidelines and procedures are easily understood and stable.

II. RESPONSIBILITY:

Accountability - Employees have little accountability for patient services rendered since the dentist is legally responsible for these services. The employee does represent the unit when guiding dental and dental assistant students, and when instructing patients in basic oral hygiene.

Consequence of Action - The employees' work could affect the safety and wellbeing of the patient since they are performing procedures directly on the patient; however, the dentist is at the chairside during most procedures and is legally responsible for the work performed.

Review - Chairside work is closely reviewed/supervised by the dentist. Operatory management duties are performed independently, but reviewed for effectiveness and efficiency when the operatory is in use.

III. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS:

Subject Matter - Employee explains dental assisting and office management procedures; explains oral hygiene care to students, patients, and dental assistants; orients dental and dental assistant students. Communications with patients may be difficult if the patient is a child, mentally ill or retarded, unpredictable, or refusing treatment.

Purpose - Work involves explaining dental treatments and patient care procedures and can involve influencing patient behavior to receive treatments.

IV. WORK ENVIRONMENT:

Nature of Working Conditions - These vary depending on the work unit. Employee works in semi-sterile/aseptic conditions. Working with uncooperative patients, inmates, the mentally ill or mentally retarded might be disagreeable.

Nature and Potential of Personal Hazards - This routinely includes exposure to sharp instruments, x-ray, chemicals, mercury vapor. Procedures for dealing with these are well established and well communicated through standard training. Working with certain patients may involve exposure to unpredictable patient response and potentially dangerous behavior as well as a variety of diseases.

V. JOB REQUIREMENTS:

Knowledges, Skills, and Abilities - Considerable knowledge of dental equipment, instruments, and procedures. Considerable knowledge of dental office business procedures. Considerable knowledge of preparation methods and dental materials. Ability to maintain records, inventories, and patient histories. Ability to deal tactfully with patients. Ability to observe, evaluate, and report required information pertaining to a dental or dental assistant student. Ability to orient dental and dental assistant students, other health care personnel, and patients.

Minimum Education and Experience - Completion of a dental assistant program from an appropriately accredited institution and one year of on-the-job training as a dental assistant and required x-ray training when needed; or an equivalent combination of education and experience.

Minimum Education and Experience for a Trainee Appointment - High school or General Educational Development diploma.