

DELTA COLLEGE
COUNSELING/ADVISING & CAREER SERVICES
DENTAL ASSISTING

Salary Range: \$20,530 - \$43,040 annually

Personal Interests: Good manual dexterity, good physical and mental health, and good communication skills.

Work Environment: Clean and modern offices

Description

Dental assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties. They work at chair side as dentists examine and treat patients. They make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain dental records. Assistants hand instruments, mix and deliver and materials to dentists, and keep patients' mouths dry and clear. Assistants also sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general healthcare.

Dental assistants prepare materials for making impressions and restorations, expose radiographs, and process dental x-ray film as directed by a dentist. They also remove sutures, apply anesthetics and cavity preventative agents to teeth, remove excess cement, and place rubber dams on the teeth to isolate them for individual treatment. Depending on whether the dental assistant has lab duties or office duties the job description will change.

Working Conditions

Dental assistants work under the supervision of a dentist. Employment may include working in private dental offices, public health clinics, dental schools, the armed forces, hospitals, or nursing homes.

Dental assistants work in clean, modern offices. Most assistants work 32 to 40 hours per week with time off during the

week if they work on Saturday. Overtime may be required when there is an emergency or the dentist is behind schedule.

Training, Other Qualifications

The employer sometimes provides on-the-job training, although an Associate Degree in Dental Assisting is generally necessary to qualify a person for employment in this field. Community and junior colleges, trade schools, technical institutes or the armed forces offer training programs. Assistants must be a dentist's "third hand"; therefore, dentists look for people who are reliable, can work well with others, and have good manual dexterity.

Certification is available through the Dental Assisting National Board. Certification is an acknowledgment of an assistant's qualifications and professional competence, and may be an asset when seeking employment. Candidates may qualify to take the certification examination by graduating from an accredited training program, or by having 2 years of full-time experience as a dental assistant. In addition, applicants must have current certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Upon successful completion of the Dental Assisting program at Delta College, you are eligible to take the exam to become a CDA (Certified Dental Assistant) and the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Service exam to become a Registered

Dental Assistant (RDA). The Commission on Dental Accreditation accredits the Delta College program, a specialized accrediting body recognized by the Council on Post-secondary Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education.

Job Outlook

Nationally, employment of dental assistants is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2014. The demand for dental care will increase as a result of a growing and aging population and the more widespread availability of dental insurance. Dentists are also increasing their productivity by using dental assistants. In fact, many areas of the country are experiencing a shortage of trained dental assistants, especially chair side assistants.

Earnings

Nationally, median hourly earnings of dental assistants were \$13.62 in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between \$11.06 and \$16.65 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$9.11, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$19.97 an hour.

Benefits vary substantially by practice setting and may be contingent upon full-time employment. According to the American Dental Association (ADA), almost all full-time dental assistants employed by private practitioners received paid vacation time. The ADA also found that 9 out of 10 full-time and part-time dental assistants received dental coverage.

Dental assistants may begin as trainees and receive on-the-job training in their duties for a period ranging from 4 to 12 months. However, most employers

prefer applicants who have completed a formal dental assistant training program. Dental assistants may advance to become registered dental assistants and chief or head dental assistants.

According to the May 2006 Occupational Employment Statistics put out by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average wage for Dental Assistants in Michigan was \$32,270.

Average salaries for selected areas in Michigan in May 2006 were:

| Area | Annual Salary |
|--------------|---------------|
| Ann Arbor | \$36,210 |
| Bay City | \$36,070 |
| Flint | \$31,210 |
| Grand Rapids | \$33,140 |
| Lansing | \$33,130 |

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations supporting health practitioners include medical assistants, physical therapy assistants, occupational therapy assistants, pharmacy technicians and assistants, and veterinary assistants.

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 Sources: Occupational Outlook Handbook, MI Occupational Information System, Eureka, Delta College Catalog, 2006 Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates and System of Interactive Guidance and Information - Plus.

Career Center, D 132
 Bay City/Saginaw: (989) 686-9072
 Midland/Auburn: (989) 495-4000, Ext. 9072
 Frankenmuth, Birch Run, Reese & Vassar: (989) 758-3400, Ext. 9072
<http://www.delta.edu/careercenter>

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