Dental Hygiene Information

CAREER DESCRIPTION

Dental hygienists are licensed health care professionals who promote oral health and wellness. Dental hygienists educate patients regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral care, remove soft and hard deposits from teeth, and provide other preventive dental care. Hygienists examine patients' oral cavity—head, neck, lips, cheeks, tongue, teeth and gums recording the presence of diseases or abnormalities. After assessing a patient's conditions, they develop a dental hygiene diagnosis.

Hygienists remove plaque, calculus, and stains from teeth, expose and develop dental X-rays, and apply cavity-preventive agents, such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants. In some states, they also administer local anesthetics and nitrous oxide; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; perform root planning as a periodontal therapy; and smooth and polish restorations.

Hygienists may not diagnose diseases, but they can prepare clinical and laboratory diagnostic tests for the dentist to interpret. Hygienists may also work chair-side with the dentist during treatment.

ACADEMIC FACTORS FOR DENTAL HYGIENE SCHOOL ADMISSION

There are various levels of certification for dental hygiene. Commonly, students pursue a bachelor's degree. As such, many students desiring to pursue a degree in dental hygiene will choose an undergraduate institution that has such a program, or transfer to one after completing some classes at another university. Students may choose any major, as long as they also complete the prerequisite courses for admittance to a dental hygiene program (either as a transfer student or as a post-Baccalaureate).

Some dental hygiene programs may require completion of the Health Occupations Aptitude Test. This is not always a requirement however, and should be investigated thoroughly before being pursued.

SAMPLE PREREQUISITES

*Remember, this list is a sample and may not be adequate for every school. Consult with your selected schools for actual requirements and better accuracy. Pay close attention to lab requirements and specific credit hours required.

ENGLISH	
WRTG 150	Freshman Writing
PSYCHOLOGY	
PSYCH 111	General Psychology
SOCIAL SCIENCES	
SOC 111	Introductory Sociology
STATISTICS	
STAT 121	Principles of Statistics
MICROBIOLOGY	
MMBIO 221/222	General Microbiology with Lab
ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY	
CELL 220	Human Anatomy/Lab
CELL 305	Human Physiology
CELL 363	Adv. Physiology Lab
CHEMISTRY	
CHEM 101	Intro General Chemistry Nutrition and Food Science
NUTRITION AND FOOD SCIENCE	
NDFS 100	Essentials of Human Nutrition
PUBLIC SPEAKING	
TMA 150	Public Speaking

APPLICATION PROCESS

There is no standardized application process for dental hygiene programs. Each program must be applied to individually. Most programs have a website with downloadable applications or instructions on how to apply. Be sure to include all elements of each application, as they may vary slightly from school to school.

OTHER RESOURCES

- American Dental Hygienists' Association – www.adha.org/
- American Dental Association – www.ada.org/
- Explore Health Careers – www.explorehealthcareers.org

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