

Career Information: Dental Hygienist

Description:

Dental hygienists are oral health clinicians and educators who help the public develop and maintain good oral health. Dental hygienists may perform preventative and therapeutic services under the supervision of a dentist. Specific responsibilities of the hygienist vary depending on the laws of the state in which she or he is employed. These responsibilities may include removing deposits and stains from the patient's teeth, providing instruction for patient self-care, nutritional counseling, applying topical fluoride to prevent tooth decay, taking dental and medical histories, exposing and developing x-rays, making impressions of teeth for study models, and preparing other diagnostic aids for use by the dentist. Many hygienists are involved with local school districts to help promote dental health among children.

Schools:

Since BYU does not offer a dental hygiene degree, the first thing to do is research schools and programs. Most dental hygiene programs grant an associate degree, although some also offer a certificate, a bachelor's degree, or a master's degree. A minimum of an associate degree or certificate in dental hygiene is required in order to work in a private dental office. A bachelor's or master's degree usually is required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs. To access a list of accredited schools contact the Health Professions Advisement Center on campus or to go <http://www.adha.org>. Weber State University is the only school in Utah which offers a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene and an in-depth handout on the application process and pre-requisites for that program can be found in the Health Professions Advisement Center.

Pre-requisites:

Admission requirements for entering dental hygiene programs vary depending on the school; however here are some basic guidelines. As a BYU student, most of these requirements have already been met.

- high school diploma or GED
- 18 year age minimum
- high school courses in Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, English
- minimum "C" average in high school
- college entrance test scores
- depending on the institution, prerequisite courses in Chemistry, English, Speech, Psychology and Sociology

Each school will have different class requirements, but examples of BYU classes to take would be: Anatomy, Physiology, Microbiology, Psychology, Human Nutrition, and Chemistry.

Licensure:

Dental hygienists must be licensed by the State in which they practice. To qualify for licensure, a candidate must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene school and pass both a written and clinical examination. The American Dental Association Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations administers the written examination, which is accepted by all States and the District of

Columbia. State or regional testing agencies administer the clinical part of the examination. In addition, most States require an examination on the legal aspects of dental hygiene practice.

For information on Utah State Licensure, see: <http://www.dopl.utah.gov/licensing/dental.html>

Job Outlook/Earnings:

Employment of dental hygienists is expected to grow much faster than most other fields in the next seven years, in response to increasing demand for dental care and the greater utilization of hygienists to perform services previously performed by dentists. In fact, dental hygienists are expected to be one of the fastest growing occupations through the year 2012. As dentists' workloads increase, they are expected to hire more hygienists to perform preventive dental care, such as cleaning, so that they may devote their own time to more profitable procedures. Median hourly earnings of dental hygienists were \$26.59 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$21.96 and \$32.48 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17.34, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$39.24 an hour.

For help finding a job, once you are licensed:
<http://www.adha.org/careerinfo/jsearch/jsearch1.htm>

Resources BYU offers/recommends:

Pre-professional Advisement Center
3328 WSC.
801-422-3044
health_professions@byu.edu
<http://ccc.byu.edu/healthpro/>

Dr. Ezekiel Dumke College of Health Professions
Weber State University
3907 University Circle
Ogden, UT 84408-3907
1-800-350-7042
<http://apps.weber.edu/majors/default2.aspx?id=healthprofessions@weber.edu>

Additional Resources:

<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos097.htm>

<http://www.adha.org>

<http://www.iseek.org/sv/13000.jsp?id=100059>

All of the information on this sheet was compiled from an interview with Jeanine Ehat, from the BYU Pre-Professional office, handouts distributed by the Pre-Professional Office, the Occupational Outlook Handbook online, and various websites, which are listed in the additional resources section of this handout.