



Dental Assisting/Assistant CIP Code 51.0601

Introduction – Program of Study

Dental assistants carry out a wide variety of jobs within a private dental office, clinic or hospital setting. During dental procedures, assistants work with the dentist to provide a second pair of hands while giving comfort to the patient. Some of these jobs include, but are not limited to, greeting patients, preparing procedure trays, mixing required dental materials, evacuation of fluids and the transfer of instruments and instrument sterilization. They also give oral hygiene instructions along with preoperative and postoperative instructions and nutrition counseling.

Dental assistants are certified by the state of Pennsylvania to expose and process dental X-rays as directed by a dentist. They may also remove sutures, apply topical anesthetics to tissues and remove excess cement after the final placement of crowns and bridges. Dental assistants may carry out laboratory duties, such as taking impressions, pouring models, trimming casts, constructing bleaching trays and making temporary crowns. As a dental receptionist, one can schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, maintain and file dental records, handle accounts receivable and order dental supplies.

Dental assisting is a challenging and rewarding career, demanding versatility and a willingness to assume responsibility for many different tasks. Dental assistants use a variety of interpersonal and clinical skills to meet the oral health needs of many different patients each day. They may also provide oral health instruction in primary and secondary schools and other settings.

Generally, dental assistants in Pennsylvania receive training by developing and demonstrating competencies as a student in a career and technical education dental assisting program or developing and demonstrating competencies as a postsecondary student in an adult dental assisting program. Careers include certified dental assistant (CDA), certified expanded function dental assistant (EFDA) and certified dental practice management assistant (CDPMA). The Pennsylvania State Board of Dentistry ensures competency by the licensure of dentists and the certification of the EFDA credential. All dental assistants and expanded function dental assistants are required to work under the direct or general supervision of a licensed dentist.

The flexibility offered by full and part time employment options and availability of evening and weekend hours enables dental assistants to balance career and lifestyle needs. Assistants also have opportunities to work in a wide variety of settings including private dental practices, educational and community institutions, research teams and dental corporations.

The services that dental assistants provide are needed and valued by a large percentage of the population. There is currently a great demand for dental assistants. Employment opportunities will be excellent well into the future. With the emphasis on preventive care, dentists will need to employ more dental assistants than ever before to meet the increased demand for dental services.

Assumptions of this Program of Study

High quality programs should meet the following standards:

1. Promote positive working relationships.
2. Implement a curriculum that fosters all areas of skill development
3. Use appropriate and effective teaching approaches.
4. Provide ongoing assessments of student progress.
5. Employ and support qualified teaching staff.
6. Establish and maintain relationships and use resources of the community.
7. Provide a safe and healthy learning environment.
8. Implement strong program organization and supervision policies that result in high quality teaching and learning.
9. Integrate academic skills and aptitudes necessary for postsecondary education, gainful employment and a foundation of lifelong learning.

CIP Code

51.0601 Dental Assisting/Assistant

This is an instructional program that prepares individuals to function effectively as an integral member of the dental health team. The practitioner will perform chair side assisting, related office duties, selected dental office laboratory procedures and dental radiography under the supervision of a licensed dentist. The planned courses should include instruction in standard precautions, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, communications skills, computer literacy, anatomy and physiology, microbiology and sterilization. Dental science instruction includes content in dental materials, dental radiography, oral anatomy, histology, oral embryology, oral pathology and therapeutics. Clinical science encompasses the principles and application of office management, chair side assisting, dental emergencies, and legal and ethical aspects of dental practice. Clinical practice is an integral part of the program designed to perfect students' competence in performing dental assisting functions. The program must include concurrent theoretical and practical application of content areas.

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