

Career study: dental assistant

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Thecareerarea of dental assistant does, in many ways, relate directly to the skills and knowledge learnt in the Administrative Office Professional program (APRO). Skills such as computer knowledge, bookkeeping, customer service, human relations, reading and writing, verbalcommunication, and active listening are an essential part of being a dental assistant. APRO students already obtain these skills. This report shows how becoming a dental assistant is a great career choice for APRO students. With only an additional eight to ten months of training, an APRO student could become a ental assistant and earn a great wage, as well as acquire many sought after job perks. Job perks of a dental assistant include Monday to Friday daytime hours, free dental care, monthly or yearly bonuses, and medical benefits. Dental assistants primarily work in dental offices; however, there are jobs available inhealthcare units and hospitals as well. The research that was conducted for this report consists of bothprimary and secondarysources. The primary research sources include aninterviewof a local dental assistant, as well as the researcher’s own experience and knowledge.

Secondary sources of research include Google searches, ALIS website, STATS Canada, and APRO text books. The three main aspects covered in this report are as follows: 1) Occupational Inventory a. Work environment b. Perks c. Market trends 2) Personality Fit d. Stress level/mental strains e. Personality traits recommended/required 3) Future Potential f. Continuing education requirements g. Advancement opportunities Potential Career Choice: Dental Assistant Introduction Weekends off, daytime hours, decent wages, free dental care, medical benefits, and yearly bonuses! These, in many cases, are the perks that career seekers are looking for.

Look no further. These, among others, are the perks the career of dental assistant has to offer. One might think that dental assisting has nothing to do with the tasks or skills learnt in the Administrative Office Professional program (APRO); however, there are many duties involved in dental assisting that relate directly to APRO knowledge. Skills such as computer knowledge, bookkeeping, customer service, human relations, reading and writing, verbal communication, and active listening are essential in a dental assisting career. As an APRO student, one obtains those skills.

However, an APRO student would need to further their education. A dental assistant training program is needed to pursue a career in dental assisting. This training program would typically only be an additional eight to ten months over and above the APRO program. The APRO program is a good foundation as it gives students many of the basic skills needed to be successful in any program or career area. The dental assistant program differs by educational institution, but for the most part, prerequisites include

a 30-level of English (which all APRO students already have), biology, and chemistry. Dental assisting is a very diverse career.

One never knows what sort of situation or emergency may arise. For example, an appointment may be as simple as a routine check-up or a filling, and may be as complicated as a tooth breaking off at the gum line during an extraction which can lead to dental surgery. Duties of dental assistants are as diverse as the job itself. Duties will change from office to office, and day to day, but will include tasks such as:

- * Prepare patient, sterilize and disinfect instruments, set up instrument trays, prepare materials, and assist dentist during dental procedures
- * Take and prepare dental diagnostic x-rays
- Record treatment information in patient records
- * Take and record medical and dental histories and vital signs of patient
- * Provide postoperative instructions prescribed by dentist
- * Assist dentist in management of medical and dental emergencies
- * Instruct patients in oral hygiene and plaque control programs
- * Apply protective coating of fluoride to teeth
- * Schedule appointments, prepare bills, and receive payment for dental services, complete insurance forms, and maintain records using computer or manually

Because dental assisting does entail working in someone's mouth, it may not be appealing to everyone.

However, dental assistants are a vital part of the health care profession. Most people have, at some point in time, experienced the excruciating pain of a tooth ache. Without dentists and dental assistants, one would have to suffer through the pain, or extract the tooth one's self. One might choose dental assisting as a career if one enjoys working in an office environment, prefer

daytime hours, and the medical field is of interest to them. There are many perks associated with being a dental assistant such as wages and bonuses.

Dentistry is a rapidly growing field, therefore leaving many new jobs available both now and in the future. One who enjoys helping others, and wants to make a difference in the lives of many, would be satisfied in the career of dental assisting. Dental assisting is a relatively low stress-level job. Because life-long learning is a required part of being a dental assistant, one must have a love of education and be committed to life-long learning. This report will look at the occupational inventory of dental assisting, including work environment, job perks, and market trends.

It will also look at the personality fit for one interested in seeking a career in this area. The personality fit will include such information as the stress level of the job, personality traits required/recommended, and potential interests and passions one might have. Finally, this report will look at the future potential of this career choice for APRO students. The future potential will share information such as continuing education requirements and advancement opportunities. The facts and findings in this report are based on both primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources include an interview with a dental assistant. I chose to interview a local dental assistant who works at Dr. Lo's office here in Brooks, Alberta. The researcher will also be using her own experience and knowledge as primary research. The secondary research consists of Google searches, ALIS website, STATS Canada, and APRO textbooks. Facts and Findings Occupational Inventory Occupational inventory is an especially important

aspect of a career because it looks at things such as work environment, career perks, and market trends.

These specifics can help one decide if a certain career, in this case dental assisting, is right for them. Work environment. Dental assistants have a variety of different working environments to choose from. Dental assistants work as part of a dental health care team. Their duties can vary and can include working as chair-side assistants, intra-oral assistants, administrative assistants, community health assistants, sterilization assistants, research assistants, or treatment coordinators. Dental assistants can also work in dental sales and insurance or dental education.

However, dental offices are the primary employer of dental assistants, with 97% of dental assistants working in dental offices. Typical hours of dental offices are Monday to Friday, 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. Some offices, however, are open during the evenings and weekends to accommodate a larger portion of the population. As shown in Figure 1, according to STATS Canada 2011, 99% of dental assistants are women. In larger offices, one can expect to work alongside many women. In smaller offices, on the other hand, one can expect to work closely with the dentist and a few other staff. Figure 1 Gender of Dental Assistants

Perks. There are several perks in the career of dental assistant. These perks may include good wages, good hours, free dental care for one's family, yearly or monthly bonuses, and paid continuing education. As shown in Figure 2, according to the 2011 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, Albertans in the Dental Assistants' occupational group earned between \$15.00 and \$34.00 per hour (2011 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, 2011). Therefore, the

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average wage of dental assistants in Alberta is around \$26.40 an hour. As stated previously, most dental office hours are Monday to Friday, with daytime hours.

In many cases, dental offices provide their staff with free dental care for both the employee and the employee's family. Many offices offer incentives in the form of either monthly or yearly bonuses. If the office is busy and makes over a certain amount of money in a month or year, a percentage of the excess money will be awarded to staff according to seniority and hours worked. Because dental assistants are required to keep up-to-date with their education and skills, most dental offices pay for continuing education. Figure 2 Current Wages Earned for Dental Assistants

Current Wages Earned for Dental Assistants | Wages | Low (5th percentile) | High (95th percentile) | Average | Median | Starting | \$15.00 | \$27.00 | \$21.82 | \$23.00 | Overall | \$21.00 | \$32.57 | \$26.40 | \$27.00 | Top | \$25.24 | \$34.00 | \$30.14 | \$30.47 | Figure 2 Figure 2 Market trends. Over 4,100 Albertans are employed in the Dental Assistants' occupational group. It is expected to have an annual average growth of 3.2%, which is above average. (Dental Assistant's Occupation Group, 2012) It is expected that about 131 new positions will be created each year, in addition to job openings created by employment turnover.

Employment turnover is expected to increase as members of the baby boomer generation will be retiring over the next few years. Figure 3 shows the estimated yearly growth of dental assistant positions available in Alberta over the next few years. Figure 3 Estimated Yearly Growth of Dental Assistant Jobs in Alberta Personality Fit Being happy and comfortable at work

is very important. One usually spends more time at work than they do anywhere else. Therefore, the personality fit of a given career, specifically dental assisting, is crucial.

Personality fit for a career includes the stress level and mental strains, personality traits recommended, and personal interests and passions. Stress level/mental strains. Dental assistants can come across some stressful situations. Sometimes, a procedure does not go as planned, leaving it up to the dentist and dental assistant to determine what to do next to ensure the safety and well-being of the patient. Although this may not be a regular occurrence, a dental assistant must have critical thinking ability and work well under pressure.

When an appointment runs over time, this often leaves the next scheduled patient waiting longer than anticipated for his/her turn. This can sometimes lead to a stressful situation if the patient who is waiting does not understand the situation. Overall, most dental assistants have a low- to moderate-level of stress in their everyday work. Personality traits recommended/required. Dental assistants are required to work closely with their patients and co-workers. In order to communicate well with both patients and co-workers, one should be kind, patient, outgoing, an active listener, and organized.

The ability to stay calm while under pressure and during emergencies is essential. Because dental assistants work side by side with dentists, one must be a team player and pay close attention to detail. It is the dental assistant's job to know what the dentist needs next. Personal interests and passions. One who has a passion for helping others and for making a real difference in people's lives may enjoy being a dental assistant. One should

also have a general interest in the medical field. Dental assistants require continuing education; therefore, life-long learners would be satisfied in this career. Future Potential

In many cases, employees want to be able to advance within their career area. Therefore, looking at the future potential of a career, in this case dental assistant, determines whether or not it is for him/her. Future potential information includes continuing education requirements and advancement opportunities. Continuing education requirements. Dental assistants must maintain their competency through the CADA Continuing Competence Program (CPP) (Dental Assistant Registration Process, 2012). This program assesses, maintains, and monitors ongoing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgments of professional dental assistants.

According to the Alberta Government, dental assistants must do the following activities each year in order to keep their Continuing Competence current:

- * Complete one hundred (100) hours in the dental field, or three hundred (300) in the past three (3) years
- * Review the Competency Profile
- * Complete the Competency Self-Assessment
- * Complete a Proposed Learning Plan by the renewal deadline
- * Undertake appropriate Learning Activities to complete your proposed Learning Objectives
- * Keep the proof of your completed Learning Activities.

At least once in every five years you will be asked to send in Verification of Learning documents and Completed Learning Plans. CADA will want to see evidence of two completed Learning Objectives for each year Advancement Opportunities. Depending on the size of dental office, there are advancement opportunities for dental assistants. Although a dental assistant is a dental

assistant, there are different skill sets and knowledge levels involved. If a dental assistant has furthered his/her education with advanced courses in specialty areas, for example, he/she would make a higher salary.

Also, some dental assistants move on to be administrative managers of the dental offices where they work. Conclusion Based on the facts and findings in this report, dental assistant is a great career choice for APRO students. With only an additional eight months of training, an APRO student can have the opportunity to be a vital part of the health care system by becoming a dental assistant. Many of the skills already learnt in APRO are essential in the career area of dental assisting.

If one loves to work with people, is outgoing, patient, and loves helping others, dental assisting may be for him/her. If one chooses this career path, one can look forward to good pay, hours, and benefits. References 2011 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey. (2011). Retrieved February 25, 2013, from ALIS: [www. alis. ca](http://www.alis.ca) Dental Assistant's Occupation Group. (2012). Retrieved February 25, 2013, from Statistics Canada: www. statcan. gc. ca Dental Assistant Registration Process. (2012, May). Retrieved February 25, 2013, from Government of Alberta: http://www. albertacanada. com/Dental_Assisant_May_2012. pdf