



Dental Assistants

Occupational Profile for CUNY Kingsborough Community College

SUMMER 2016

What is Dental Assisting? Dental assistants perform many tasks, ranging from patient care and taking x-rays to record keeping and scheduling appointments. They work under the supervision of a dentist and work closely with dental hygienists.

Dental Assistant by the numbers:

- The **median pay** in NYC is **\$33,900**.¹
- There are **7,071 jobs** in New York City.²
- Between 2012 and 2022, these jobs are **projected to grow by 19.2 percent**.³
- There were **343 job advertisements** posted online within the last 12 months.⁴
- 135 (39 percent) of these ads specified education requirements. Of those that did, **2 percent asked for an associate degree** and 98 percent required a high school diploma or vocational training.⁵

Top titles. Just one – Dental Assistant. Unlike other fields of work where job titles may vary by employer, this job title is largely embraced by the industry. There may be areas of specialization, like an Orthodontic Assistant, but these are much less common among online job postings.⁶

Where do they work? More than four in five (83%) dental assistants work in dentists' offices. About one in 20 (5.7%) find work through temp agencies, which likely place clients with dentists' offices. They also work in hospitals, doctors' offices, outpatient care centers and higher education institutions, but these settings are much less common.⁷

Top employers. Because most dentists' offices are small, their capacity for job openings is also limited. Individual offices may be the largest employer of dental assistants collectively, but individual firms will not rank among the top advertising employers. Rather, employers who posted the most ads online over the last 12 months include major health and higher education institutions. These include the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, Columbia University, Lutheran Healthcare Group, Montefiore Medical Center and NYU Lutheran Medical Center, to name a few.⁸

What are some of the core functions of the job and how do they vary?

Certified dental assistants are licensed by the State to provide patient education, take patient medical histories and vitals, provide a limited range of clinical care (e.g., placing and removing dental dams, orthodontic wires and ligatures, taking impressions, remove stitches) and provide other dental supportive services. All of these services are performed while the supervising dentist is onsite. Dentists' offices derive great value from certified dental assistants because these staff are able to assist with both clinical and administrative duties.

Without certification, dental assistants may not perform patient services independently or any tasks that are within the scope of practice of any

¹ "Dental Assistant," SOC 31-9091, New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), 2015.

² Dental Assistant, NYSDOL OES.

³ Dental Assistant, NYSDOL, Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections, New York City region, 2012-2022.

⁴ Period ranges from April 19, 2015 to April, 2016. Geographic scope is confined to New York City's five boroughs. Source: Burning Glass Technologies, Labor Insights.

⁵ Labor Insights.

⁶ Labor Insights.

⁷ NYSDOL, Staffing Patterns, 2015.

⁸ Labor Insights.



licensed profession.⁹ However, unlicensed dental assistants may support the dental health team in other ways, such as in preparing patients for treatment, preparing instruments and other tools to be used, decontaminating and sterilizing instruments, keeping records of dental treatments, scheduling patient appointments and assisting with revenue management.

What qualifications do they need?¹⁰

Education and technical training. To become a Certified Dental Assistant, candidates must complete a one-year, 24-credit Dental Assisting program approved by the State and then pass the Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) exam administered by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB). The exam tests radiation health and safety, infection control and general chairside assisting.

Equivalent programs are also accepted by the State. These include one-year 24 semester-hour programs from a degree-granting institution or BOCES program with instruction in biomedical sciences, professional dental assisting content, clinical content, coursework in oral and written communications and basic behavioral concepts, and at least 200 hours of clinical experience.¹¹

The State also accepts an alternative course of study in dental assisting that includes coursework in biomedical sciences, professional dental assisting content and the clinical services content areas; and at least 1,000 hours of relevant work experience under a licensed dentist's direct personal supervision.¹²

People who have met the State's educational requirements, but have not taken the exam, are

permitted to practice as a Certified Dental Assistant for one year under a limited permit.

There are dental assistant programs that are not approved by New York State. People who graduate from these programs can still find work in the field, but employers ultimately give preference to licensed candidates since they are permitted a broader scope of practice. The same scenario holds true for aspiring dental assistants that lack formal training.¹³

Experience. Prior experience is preferred, but not required. For unlicensed dental assistants, it will help improve their ability to compete for work, plus it can help them work toward alternative licensing requirements acceptable to the State.

What other qualities do employers seek?¹⁴

- Detail oriented
- Dexterous
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Listening skills
- Organizational skills

Who enjoys working in dental assisting? Dental assistants help patients achieve dental health and alleviate dental discomfort, which in turn will improve their quality of life. Despite these important benefits, it can be hard to motivate patients to get the care they need because some people simply do not like to go to the dentist.

To do this job well, dental assistants must possess a combination of technical and interpersonal skills. Dental assistants must be comfortable taking direction, being a team player and following set

⁹ "Questions & Answers About Working as a Dental Assistant." Dental Professions, New York State Office of Professions, New York State Department of Education. <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/dent/dentasst.htm>

¹⁰ Payscale data and Table 1.11: Educational attainment for workers 25 years and older, U.S. DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2015.

¹¹ "Education requirements." Office of Professions, New York State Department of Education.

<http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/dent/dentcdalic.htm>

¹² "Education requirements." Office of Professions.

¹³ "Education requirements." Office of Professions.

¹⁴ "Dental Assistants." Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook. Updated December 2015. <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dental-assistants.htm#tab-4>



procedures and routines. They also prefer practical, hands-on work.

Dental assistants play a critical role in preparing patients for procedures. This work would appeal to people enjoy helping others. Many people are nervous going to the dentist, so the dental assistant should be good at making people feel at ease.

While there are many rewarding aspects to the job, it is worth noting that this is not a job for the squeamish. Given the nature of the work, dental assistants must also be comfortable with what some in the industry term, “the ick factor” like blood and unpleasant odors.

CUNY programs and degrees. Currently, Kingsborough Community College does not offer a dental assisting program. Within the CUNY system, Lehman, Medgar Evers and York Colleges each offer a dental assisting certificate program, but none are State-registered. For aspiring dental hygienists, Hostos and City Tech both offer Associate degree programs in dental hygiene (not dental assisting), and both are State-licensure qualifying.

Regional capacity.¹⁵

DENTAL ASSISTANT. There are 20 dental assisting programs registered with the State. In New York City, there are two dental assistant certificate programs, one of which is credit-bearing. Both are offered by private institutions (the Mandl School and the New York School for Medical and Dental Assisting). Access Careers also offers a certificate program in NYC, but it is not registered with the State. The St. Paul’s School of Nursing on Staten Island, also a private institution, offers the only

dental assisting associate degree program registered with the State.

The closest public institutions to offer State-registered dental assistant programs are in Long Island and each is at least an hour’s drive from Kingsborough. Nassau County BOCES and SUNY Stony Brook both offer non-credit bearing programs.

Other public community colleges with State-registered dental assistant programs include Hudson Valley Community College in Troy (credit and non-credit bearing), SUNY Buffalo Educational Opportunities Center (non-credit bearing), Monroe Community College (credit bearing and non-credit bearing), and Niagara County Community College (credit-bearing).

For details see the **Appendix: Regional Programs and Offerings.**

DENTAL HYGIENIST. At the next level, there are six associate degree programs in dental hygiene. Each is licensure-qualifying and four are offered by public institutions. Two of these are CUNY programs (one with Hostos and the other with City Tech). Three others are located in Long Island (hosted by SUNY Farmingdale and Briarcliff College), and they are at least an hour drive from Kingsborough. NYU also offers this program, but it may be inaccessible to students who are unable to afford a private school education.

NYU and SUNY Farmingdale each offer bachelor programs in dental hygiene. Dental hygienists do not need to pursue a bachelor-level education or beyond unless they intend to work in research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs.¹⁶

How to register a dental assistant program with the State. In New York, the State Education

recently closed, there may be other relevant offerings within CUNY that are omitted from this discussion.

¹⁶ “How to Become a Dental Hygienist.” BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook.
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dental-hygienists.htm#tab-4>

¹⁵ This analysis is informed by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). It concerns postsecondary programs that actively participated in federal student financial aid last year. Understanding there may be some relevant programs that have since come online while others may have



Department Office of Professions evaluates postsecondary programs leading to a professional licensure, including dental assisting. Programs able to meet State guidelines¹⁷ concerning dedicated resources, capacity, faculty, curricula, awards, admission and administration may apply to register with the State. This involves completing an Application for Registration of a New Program found [here](#) that requires institutions to detail their ability to meet State program guidelines and may also require a [Master Plan Amendment](#). The program registration form is generic and does not concern criteria unique to administering dental assisting programs. CUNY and SUNY institutions are instructed to contract System Administration for program registration guidance.

The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) is the only agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit postsecondary dental and dental-related education programs. CODA accreditation standards in dental assisting¹⁸ expand upon the New York State professional licensure general guidelines.

For CODA accreditation, program content must include biomedical, dental, clinical and behavioral sciences. These programs must provide students with clinical externship experience, comprised of assignments to two or more offices or clinics where most of the student's time is spent assisting with patient care.

CODA also requires these programs to maintain facilities for radiography, clinical care and lab work.¹⁹ They must maintain a faculty to student

ratio of one to six for radiography and clinical practice and one to 12 for lab and pre-clinical instruction.²⁰

Career pathways and how to access them.

There is little mobility within dental assisting, although there might be specialties such as orthodontics. The next step up is dental hygienist and people can only advance into this after completing an accredited program that is associate-level and typically takes 3 years, and then passing a licensing exam.

Unlike dental assistants, dental hygienists must have a State license in order to practice. Dental hygienists are considered part of the dental delivery team, working with dentists to perform an array of clinical services such as polishing teeth, removing tartar and plaque, placing and removing periodontal dressings and applying topical medications like sealants.²¹ They can also perform dental assisting services.

Dental hygienist jobs are attractive. For the level of educational attainment, their wages are fairly high (the median salary in NYC is \$82,180). There is also strong projected growth for dental hygienists (25.7% from 2012-2022).

Becoming a dentist could be the next logical step after dental hygienist. Although it nearly goes without saying, this would require extensive education, and just like other positions in this field, dentists must also get licensed by the State in order to practice. This may not be a feasible option for people with limited resources and competing priorities

¹⁷ Commissioner's Regulations Concerning Program Registration. Section 52.2: Standards for the Registration of Undergraduate and graduate Curricula Standards for the Registration of Curricula in the Licensed Professions. April 2016. [https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/Ieca63dd8c22111dd97adcd755bda2840?viewType=FullText&originContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/Ieca63dd8c22111dd97adcd755bda2840?viewType=FullText&originContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default))

¹⁸ Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs. Commission on Dental

Accreditation, 2016.

http://www.ada.org/~media/CODA/Files/DA_Standard_s.pdf?la=en

¹⁹ 2016 CODA accreditation standards for dental assisting.

²⁰ 2016 CODA accreditation standards for dental assisting.

²¹ "Dentistry." New York State Office of Professions. April 2016. <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/dent/>



Appendix: Regional Programs and Offerings

(Sources: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and online catalogues for each profiled institution.)



= industry recognized certificate program



= credit-bearing certificate program



= certificate of completion



= 2-year degree program



= 4-year degree program



= State-certified program

Dental Assisting:

School/Program	2014 Complet.
Access Careers	
Dental Assisting Certificate	5
CUNY Lehman College	
Dental Assisting Certificate	25
CUNY Medgar Evers College	
Dental Assisting Certificate	--
CUNY York College	
Dental Assisting Certificate	8
Hudson Valley Community College	
Dental Assistant Certification	na
Dental Assistant Certification	28
Mandl School, College of Allied Health	
Dental Assistant Certification	36
Monroe Community College	
Dental Assistant Certification	41

School/Program	2014 Complet.
Nassau County BOCES	
Dental Assistant Certification (p. 17)	na
Niagara County Community College	
Dental Assistant Certification	na
NY School for Medical and Dental Assisting – Long Island	
Dental Assistant Certification	194
St. Paul's School of Nursing, Staten Island	
A.O.S. in Dental Assisting	17
SUNY Buffalo EOC	
Dental Assistant Certificate	na
SUNY Stony Brook	
Dental Assistant Certificate	na

Dental Hygienist:

School/Program	2014 Complet.
Briarcliff Community College, Patchogue	
A.A.S. Dental Hygiene	25
CUNY City Tech	
A.A.S. Dental Hygiene	60
CUNY Hostos Community College	
A.A.S. Dental Hygiene	41
NYU	
A.A.S. Dental Hygiene	52

School/Program	2014 Complet.
B.S. Dental Hygiene	11
SUNY Farmingdale	
A.A.S. Dental Hygiene (day)	35
A.S. Dental Hygiene (evening)	na
B.S. Dental Hygiene	20