

ASU Caduceus News



Spotlight On: Dentistry

Each week we will be spotlighting a different health profession. In addition, we will also put out editions focusing on common questions like, should I be an MD/DO or a PA? Today's spotlight is on Dentistry. If you have a health profession or question you think should be addressed, feel free to email us and let us know at prehealthtempe@asu.edu

What is Dentistry?

The dental profession is the branch of health care devoted to maintaining the health of the teeth, gums and other tissues in and around the mouth. Dentistry (DMD/DDS) is defined as the evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body. Dentists play a key role in the early detection of oral cancer and other systemic conditions of the body that manifest themselves in the mouth. They often identify other health conditions, illnesses, and other problems that sometimes show up in the oral cavity before they are identified in other parts of the body.

DMD vs. DDS - There is literally no difference between the education, licensure, or practice of a DMD or DDS. Although there can be subtle differences in curriculum (as there is in all schools) the ADA looks at both degrees identically. Why the difference then, you ask? One word: Harvard. Up until 1867 all dental degrees were DDS, but Harvard policy dictates all degrees must be latin and thus named their degree Dentariae Medicinae Doctor (Doctor of Dental Medicine). The DMD debuted when they opened a dental school that same year. When a school opens, they may choose which nomenclature to bestow upon graduates.

Pros and Cons of a Career in Dentistry:

Pros

Good work/life balance

- Dentists work approximately 35-40 hours per week. Some night and weekend work may be required, but it is rare to be on-call or be called in for an emergency after hours
- Dentistry is still a field made up of mostly small business owners. Although there are some retail dental offices found nationally, the vast majority of dental offices are owned by one or a small number of dentists who run the practice.
- Along with a good work/life balance, the respect a dentist commands in the community allows them to serve underserved populations and use their free time to give back using their unique skill-set.

Service to others

- Many patients will see their dentist 1-2 times per year meaning you can create long-term relationships. It is not uncommon for dentists to work with multiple generations of families.
- Dentists have the ability to make significant improvements in the lives of their patients. Dentists can restore smiles, alleviate pain, and improve the function of a persons' mouth, often in just one or a few visits. The instant gratification is satisfying to many.

Technology/Creativity

- Dentists have the opportunity to work with cutting edge of technology, such as lasers and computer-assisted diagnostics
- Dentistry is as much an art as it is a science. Dentists have the ability to improve the aesthetics of their patients
- Dentists must be detail-oriented and much of their work requires above average manual dexterity in order to work in a small, confined space.

Salary

- In 2018, the average net income for an independent private general practitioner who owned all or part of his or her practice was \$190,440
- There are 11 dental specialties and the average salary for specialists was \$330,180. (ADA Health Policy Institute 2018 *Survey of Dental Practice*)

Cons

Debt

- Dental school is among the most expensive and extensive schooling one can enter. The average dental graduate will leave with \$275,000 in debt and debt from dental school can be as high as \$500,000. Although pay is good, many young dentists feel pressure and stress as they navigate paying off debt and achieving their personal and professional goals.
- Many dentists strive to own their own practice and be their own boss. However, in order to own a practice, you will likely need to acquire additional debt in order to establish a new practice or purchase an existing one (American Dental Education Association).
- Along with debt from tuition and/or acquiring a dental practice is the reality that many dentists also want to maintain a family. Dentists must also be aware of additional

potential debt from buying a house, a car, or adding children to the family.

Stress

- Difficult patients - while many Dentists have good relationships with their patients, not all patients are easy. Some may dismiss you or not be happy about seeing you. You don't necessarily get to pick your patients, so it's important to see the full scope prior to entering the profession
- Many dentists look forward to running their own practice and being their own boss. But with that comes the reality of running the practice. Managing staff, patients, and general business expenses can often add stress. Finding good managers and employees is vital to the well-being of a practice.
- Dealing with insurance is a common trait throughout the healthcare field. What dentists want to do, as far treatment, is not always possible given insurance or barriers from the patient.

Physically & Emotionally Demanding

- Dentistry is a physically demanding job. Dentistry requires precision and focus in a small area, often for long periods of time. Often, dentists are hunched or in uncomfortable positions, so having good ergonomics and paying attention to physical stress is important.
- A large portion of the population identifies a fear of going to the dentist. This can cause additional emotional stress for dentists as they navigate patients who are in pain, anxious about treatment, and even rude and disrespectful. There are no guarantees in healthcare and although dentistry often leaves with positive results, when things go wrong it can be emotionally difficult.
- Many health professions come with a degree of risk related to blood-borne illness and dentists are no different. You will work with many sharp instruments and your patients will sometimes come in with a cold or contagious disease putting you at a low risk of contracting an illness or disease.

Pre-Dentistry Requirements

Students planning to enter dental school should focus on academic and non-academic factors prior to application.

Academics:

All dental schools require you to complete prerequisite coursework prior to admission. Many of these courses provide content which will be tested on the DAT and serve as the foundation for your basic health sciences during the first two years of dental school. Although dentists need a lot of qualities to succeed, a strong understanding of the sciences is key. Dental schools look at an applicant holistically and can and do understand challenges, but applicants ultimately need to show strong science academics for an extended 2-3 year period prior to applying.

Letters of Recommendation:

Dental schools will require you to submit letters of recommendation along with your application. Letters should come primarily from academic science professors you've had in a classroom setting. At least one letter should come from a Dentist. Students may also consider a research PI/mentor for additional letters. You should be introducing yourself to faculty members and engaging throughout the semester to build a good working relationship prior to asking for a letter. Coming from a large university with large classes will not absolve you from needing letters. Letters are an important component to your application and are reviewed prior to admitting you to a dental program.

Non-Academics:

Exposure to the field of dentistry is essential to articulating why you are interested in entering the profession. Students should aim to spend time shadowing, volunteering, or working in settings with dentists throughout their time as an ASU student. While there is no minimum number of hours students should complete, the more exposure you gain the better understanding you will have of the pros and cons to entering the profession.

Students should also plan to engage outside the classroom through internships, volunteer work, student employment, part/full-time employment, and/or research. What you choose to do with your time will help schools build a picture of who you are, what your interests are, and what responsibilities you had in addition to being a student. There is no preference for students to engage in one type of activity over another.

Clubs

[ASU Pre-Dental Society](#)

[Pre-Dental Student Association Downtown](#)

Dental School

Currently, there are 67 accredited dental schools in the U.S and students typically apply to 10-15. The dental school application is a centralized application service known as AADSAS. Applications for dental school open each year at the beginning of June. Dental schools may begin notifying students of acceptance no earlier than December 1. Interviews typically take place between September and January.

There are two dental schools in Arizona: Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health, Mesa, AZ and Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine, Glendale, AZ.

[WICHE](#) - Arizona does not have a public dental school. As such, students from Arizona and other qualifying states may apply to public dental schools in the West as part of a Western Exchange Program known as WICHE. WICHE requires an additional application and sometimes requires students to sign a contract stating their pledge to come back and work in Arizona upon graduating. Students accepted as a WICHE student will pay a reduced tuition similar to that of

an in-state student.

Dental school is 4 years

- The first two years consist of basic health science classroom learning - classes in anatomy, microbiology, physiology, pharmacology, and more are taken. Students will also have the opportunity to gain clinical exposure in a simulation lab where you will work with your fellow classmates serving as patients.
- The last two years of dental school mostly involve clinical study and some practice management instruction. Students will provide direct patient care for a variety of patients to ensure students have a wide variety of experiences. Students often rotate through various clinicals, hospitals, and other settings, and work under the supervision of a clinical supervisor.

In order to practice as a dentist, you must complete your degree and pass the licensing exams. The licensing exams consist of written and clinical portions. These take place during the course of dental school.

Dental School Applications

Total Dental Applicants - 11,300

Total Dental Matriculated - 6,163

Men - 48.7%

Women - 50.5%

Total ASU Dental Applicants - 107

Total ASU Dental Matriculated - 44

Average sGPA for accepted students - **3.45**

Average cGPA for accepted students - **3.55**

Average Academic DAT for accepted students - **20.5**

Average Perceptual Ability DAT for accepted students - **20.1**

Average Total Science DAT for accepted students - **20.4**

Dentistry Outlook

Increasing numbers of older adults are keeping their teeth longer, greater awareness of oral health care, and a high demand for cosmetic services. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts employment growth of 7.6 percent, equating to 10,400 new dentist jobs through the year 2028.

Cost

DAT Test: \$475

- Fee includes administration and official score reporting to all dental schools selected at time of application
- \$45 per recipient for score requests made after the time of application

- Students must register for a Dentpin through the American Dental Association prior to registering for a DAT
- DAT scores range from 1-30 and test-takers receive their raw score at the end of the exam

DAT Prep: Average \$500, but can increase to over \$1000

- Students will study for 3-6 months prior to sitting for the exam

AADSAS Application: \$251 + \$108 per additional school

- Average: \$1,000+

Fee Assistance: Yes

Secondary Applications: Varies, fee assistance varies

Interviews: 1 in-person interview

Average Cost to Apply to Dental Schools: \$3,000

Average Cost of Attendance at Dental Schools: \$315,000 for public schools and \$495,000 for private dental schools

Average Debt for Dental Graduates: \$292,000

Videos and resources for more information:

[ADEA Go Dental](#)

[Dental School application](#)

[Explore Dentistry](#)

[DAT Test Prep](#)

[DAT](#)

[Dental School Explorer](#)

[American Student Dental Association](#)

[ADEA Dental Blogs](#)

[PreDental Podcast](#)

[The Dental Student Podcast](#)

An overview of the role and conditions cared for by Dentists

- Remove decay from teeth and fill cavities
- Repair cracked or fractured teeth and remove teeth
- Place sealants or whitening agents on teeth
- Administer anesthetics to keep patients from feeling pain during procedures
- Prescribe antibiotics or other medications
- Examine x rays of teeth, gums, the jaw, and nearby areas in order to diagnose problems
- Make models and measurements for dental appliances, such as dentures, to fit patients
- Teach patients about diets, flossing, the use of fluoride, and other aspects of dental care
- Diagnosing oral diseases.
- Promoting oral health and disease prevention.

- Creating treatment plans to maintain or restore the oral health of their patients.
- Interpreting x-rays and diagnostic tests.
- Ensuring the safe administration of anesthetics.
- Monitoring growth and development of the teeth and jaws.
- Performing surgical procedures on the teeth, bone and soft tissues of the oral cavity.