The field of dentistry offers many opportunities for rewarding careers. Professional oral health care requires a team effort to ensure success. The core of the oral health care team is comprised of dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental laboratory technicians.

The knowledge, talents and skills of each of the team members are critical in providing the services necessary for total oral health care. These services include oral health education, disease prevention, disease detection, diagnosis and treatment, aesthetic improvement, and surgical restoration.

Dental professionals treat people, not just teeth and mouths. Good oral health is an essential component of the total health of a person. Dental professionals interact with people of all ages and personalities from a wide range of cultures. Their skills in working with people, as well as their dentistry and teaching skills, can have a lifelong positive impact on the total health of the people who use their services.

Many other career paths, in addition to the traditional private dental practice, are open to trained dental professionals. These include careers in community health departments and other public health agencies, hospitals, military, dental research, and in industry, such as dental product development and sales.

The path is open to a challenging and rewarding career; a path that could be yours.

Sources for Dental Careers Information:
NC Dental Society, 1600 Evans Road, Cary, NC 27513, (800) 662-8754, www.ncdental.org
American Dental Association, 211 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 440-2500, www.ada.org
North Carolina Area Health Education Centers Program (AHEC), Campus Box 7165, 145 N. Medical Drive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7165, (919) 966-2461, www.nchealthcareers.com/
NC Oral Health Section - Careers in Dental Health: http://nchcap.unc.edu/
Dentist in Private Practice

Dentists examine patients, diagnose problems, and treat for disease, injury, or crooked teeth and diseased gums. Dentists fit, curate, treat gum disease, replace missing teeth or make custom dentures for the patient. They also teach patients proper oral care including nutrition and fluorides, and the prevention of gum disease and tooth loss.

Minimum of 36 semester hours of accredited college work required before entering dental school. Graduation from an accredited dental school, which usually takes four years.

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry
East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine

Dental Assistant in Private Practice

Dental assistants assist the dentist at chairside, take dental x-rays, perform laboratory procedures, sterilize instruments and help manage the office.

Certified Dental Assistant.
High School graduation and graduation from an accredited dental assistant program.
Non-certified Dental Assistant
on the job training in a dental office by a dentist (not eligible for certification).

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry

Certification Examination by the Dental Assisting National Board (Optional)

Dental Hygienist in Private Practice

Dental hygienists take patient histories, screen the teeth and gums, remove plaque and tartar, apply fluoride, apply dental sealants, and take x-rays. They also teach patients proper oral care including nutrition and fluorides, and the prevention of gum disease and tooth loss.

High School graduation and graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program.

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Cape Fear Community College, Catawba Valley Community College, Central Carolina Community College, Central Piedmont Community College, Coastal Carolina Community College, Fayetteville Technical Community College, Guilford Technical Community College, Halifax Community College, Wake Technical Community College, Wayne Community College (Associate Degrees, Certificate Programs, and Bachelor’s Degrees available)

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dental Medicine

Certification Examination by the National Association of Dental Laboratories (optional)

Additional Training

Dental Hygienist in Public Health

Public health dentists examine the oral needs of people in the community. They plan programs to prevent dental diseases and to educate the community on proper oral care including nutrition and fluorides, and the prevention of gum disease and tooth loss.

Minimum of 36 semester hours of accredited college work required before entering dental school. Graduation from an accredited dental school, which usually takes four years.

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry
East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine

Dental Laboratory Technician

Dental laboratory technicians make and repair dentures, dental crowns, braces and other dental appliances using materials such as gypsum, acrylics, ceramics and metals.

High School graduation before working in a dental laboratory.

Durham Technical Community College

Certification Examination by the National Association of Dental Laboratories (optional)

Licensure Requirements

Dentist in Public Health

Public health dentists examine the oral needs of people in the community. They plan programs to prevent dental diseases and to educate the community on proper oral care including nutrition and fluorides, and the prevention of gum disease and tooth loss.

Minimum of 36 semester hours of accredited college work required before entering dental school. Graduation from an accredited dental school, which usually takes four years.

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry
East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine

Dental Assisting National Board Certification Examination by the Dental Assisting National Board (Optional)

Employment in a dental or medical group, a hospital, institution, nursing home or in the military under the supervision of a dentist. They usually work with a dental hygienist, dental assistant and office personnel.

Entry Level: $18,480*
Statewide average for experienced: $38,210*

American Dental Hygienists’ Association, NC Dental Hygiene Association

Hygiene Education (MSDH)

Entry Level: $61,200*
Statewide average for experienced: $83,230*

American Dental Hygienists’ Association, NC Dental Hygiene Association

Master of Public Health

American Dental Hygienists’ Association, NC Dental Hygiene Association

Professional Organizations


Dental Laboratory Technicians: American Dental Technician Association, American Society of Dental Technicians.

Academic Institutions

NC Average Starting Salary (varies by region)

Entry Level:
NC Average:
Dental Assisting National Board Certification Examination by the Dental Assisting National Board (Optional)