

Dental Assistant Training Programs Prepare Students for Fast-Paced Careers

With the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting that dental assistant employment will grow more than 30 percent by 2020, now is the time for recent graduates and adult learners to enroll in high-quality training programs that will prepare them for this exciting career. Dental assistants perform a variety of direct patient care duties, making them important members of the oral healthcare team.

On the job, dental assistants are expected to maintain dental equipment, prepare patients for treatment, monitor patients after surgery, take vital signs, and apply infection control principles. They also maintain accurate patient records and perform other administrative functions. Expanded function dental assistants complete additional training, which qualifies them to perform advanced functions in the dental practice. In Pennsylvania, expanded function dental assistants may apply cavity liners, place and remove rubber dams, place composite resin restorations, and perform other duties. Two area schools offer training for this career.

Fortis Institute's Scranton campus offers a specialized technology degree for those who want to become expanded function dental assistants. Students learn how to assist dentists with surgical procedures and competently perform the duties of an expanded function dental assistant. After learning the theory necessary to excel in this field, students complete a 10-week externship in a professional facility. This hands-on learning experience gives Fortis students an edge in a competitive job market.

Luzerne County Community College offers two programs related to dental assisting. The dental assisting program is a certificate program that typically takes two semesters to complete. After learning basic anatomy and physiology, students immediately start learning about dental materials, dental radiology, and dental practice management. The program also focuses on the legal and ethical issues faced by dental assistants.

LCCC also offers an expanded function dental assistant diploma program. The program typically lasts one semester, making it a convenient option for those who want to change their careers but don't want to spend several years attending classes. Students learn about the foundations of being an expanded function dental assistant and performing duties such as removal of matrix bands, placement of composite dental restorations, and placement of amalgam restorations. The on-campus clinical skills laboratory gives students the opportunity to practice their skills and gain confidence.

Students who complete the expanded function dental assistant programs at Fortis or LCCC are prepared to take the state certification exam for this career. In 2021, the median annual salary for a dental assistant was \$38,660 per year, making it a viable career option for Northeastern Pennsylvania residents.