



Dental Assisting Q and A

with Lindsay Baker, RDA Educator

- **What exactly does a dental assistant do?** The registered dental assistant is a very valuable asset to the dental healthcare team. The specific duties of a Registered Dental Assistant (RDA) vary depending on the office and the credentials of the assistant. The main responsibility of an RDA is to offer chairside support to the dentist during procedures. This also includes maintaining the clinical area, as well as some front desk administrative duties. With oral health awareness on the rise, more individuals are able to maintain their natural teeth – resulting in an increased demand for dental care. With the proper credentials, RDAs can take x-rays, polish teeth, place sealants, and even place fillings!
- **What training is necessary to become a dental assistant?** In the state of Tennessee, most Registered Dental Assistant programs range from 8 months to 1 year in duration; however there are others shorter in duration. Some programs offer certification in as little as 10 weeks; however, additional training may be required. Upon completion of the programs, and registration with the TN Board of Dentistry, students will receive state certification that will permit them to carry out the duties of an RDA. Once a dental assistant is registered with the state, they are eligible to attend expanded function courses. One of the most important aspects of training is the hands-on clinical experience. Dentists are looking for well-trained assistants that have the skills to start working in their offices day one of employment. Most dentists will have the assistant work with them for a day or two during the interview process to assess skill level. This is why choosing a program that focuses on the hands-on clinical training is of GREAT importance.
- **What is the average income of a Registered Dental Assistant?** The average income of a Registered Dental Assistant varies by location. According to the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development's 2014 Occupational Wages' data, the approximate starting salary and/or wage information for nearly 6,000 Dental

Assistants across the state is \$25,705 annually (\$12.35/hr). That can be expected to grow to \$38,506 annually (\$18.50/hr), with a mean of \$34,239 (\$16.45/hr) and median of \$34,038 (\$16.35/hr). In the Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro, TN MSA the 2013 annual median wage locally is \$35,287. Keep in mind that the more skilled the individual is, and the more expanded function credentials they have, they have increased potential to earn more. The more valuable an RDA is to the practice, the greater the earning potential!

- **Where can a dental assistant work?** There are several different employment opportunities for a Registered Dental Assistant (RDA). RDAs may work at a general dentist office, a specialty practice, or a hospital setting. There are also employment opportunities for RDAs in the nonprofit world as well. A background in dental assisting also serves as a critical foundation piece for other employment opportunities such as a dental supply company or dental laboratory representative, an educator, dental office manager, dental laboratory technician, or career advancements such as a Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) or licensed dentist.
- **What type of person is a good fit for a career in dental assisting?** Any person that is a motivated team player, detail oriented, able to multitask, and has a desire to help others would be a good fit for this career. This career does require participation with minor surgical procedures. I would encourage anyone that is considering dental assisting for a career to arrange an observation shift to make sure that dentistry is a good fit for them.
- **What is the most rewarding part of your job?** The most rewarding part of my career as a Registered Dental Assistant is being able to be a part the process of a new smile. When you see a person go from being in pain and feeling hopeless about their oral health, to feeling well physically and smiling every chance they get with confidence; it makes the job worth it. I love seeing the transformation. A smile changes everything.