
WHAT CAN I DO WITH A MAJOR IN ...**DENTAL HYGIENE**

OCCUPATIONAL OVERVIEW:

[The Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\) \(2013\)](#) explains that dental hygienists, “clean teeth, examine patients for signs of oral diseases such as gingivitis, and provide other preventative dental care. They also educate patients on ways to improve and maintain good oral health”. Furthermore, “Dental hygienists use many types of tools to do their job. They clean and polish teeth with hand and powered tools, as well as ultrasonic devices. In some cases, they remove stains with an air polishing device, which sprays a combination of air, water, and baking soda. They use x-ray machines to take pictures to check for tooth or jaw problems” [\(BLS, 2013\)](#). The [UNM Department of Dental Medicine website \(2013\)](#) states, “Dental hygienists work in a variety of settings including private practice. Hygienists are licensed, professional members of the healthcare team. They work to promote, prevent, and maintain oral health in the population”.

EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS:

An Associate’s degree is the minimum formal education required, however a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree is usually required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs [\(BLS, 2013\)](#). Dental hygienists must be licensed by the state in which they practice, which involves passing an examination. Consult [O*Net](#) for more information on the specific KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities) that are required for this career. Refer to the [New Mexico Dental Hygienists Association](#) for further information regarding Dental Hygiene licensure in the state of New Mexico.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO:

The UNM Department of Dental Medicine offers both a Bachelors of Science in Dental Hygiene as well as a Masters of Science in Dental Hygiene. You can find further information on the [UNM Department of Dental Medicine website \(2013\)](#).

INDUSTRIES & TARGET EMPLOYERS:

A variety of employers specifically recruit UNM students and alumni. Consult UNM’s [Lobo Career Connection](#) for a complete list of employers and current job postings. Speak with a Career Development Facilitator at the [UNM Office of Career Services](#) for help with identifying employers or additional resources for your occupation of choice.

Healthcare

Private dental offices and dental clinics, hospitals, assisted living facilities, K-12 school systems

Public Health

Change agent, consumer advocate, health education/counseling, research laboratories and institutes, occupational health and safety, community health workers, nurse, physician, physician assistant

Education/Student Affairs

University/college teaching/administration, researcher, K-12 teaching/administration, college preparation, counseling/advising, write and edit educational materials

Management

Administrator/Manager, Sales

Government

Community development, Departments of Veteran Affairs, National Institutes of Health, Armed Services

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

- Gain volunteer hours of hands on experience/observation through a dental office during your undergraduate degree.
- Build a strong foundation in basic science courses.
- Shadow professionals in a dental office to gain a better understanding of their occupation and to build relationships with professional mentors.
- Build your network and get involved on campus through student organizations and campus events. Find organizations and events at the [Student Activities Center website](#).
- Attend career related campus events such as career fairs, company information sessions, and or career workshops.
- Students who are interested in graduate school should maintain a high undergraduate GPA and develop relationships with faculty and community leaders.
- Speak with mentors and faculty about career opportunities.
- Job leads can be found on your department’s website, list-servs, newsletters, and social media sites.

STATE AND NATIONAL WAGES:

Adapted from CareerOneStop (2013)

DENTAL HYGIENISTS

Location	2013				
	10%	25%	Median	75%	90%
United States	\$46,600	\$58,100	\$70,200	\$84,600	\$96,300
New Mexico	\$50,800	\$63,200	\$73,400	\$90,700	\$107,900

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- Pre-professional Medical Society <http://www.ppmedsociety.org>
- American Dental Hygienists' Association <http://www.adha.org>
- American Dental Association <http://www.ada.org>
- New Mexico Dental Hygienist's Association <http://www.nmdha.org>
- New Mexico Regulations and Licensing Board <http://www.rld.state.nm.us/Dental/index.html>
- The University of New Mexico Dental Hygiene Program <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/dentalhy/index.shtml>



<http://onetonline.org>



www.bls.gov/

REFERENCES

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, (2012, March 29). *Occupational Outlook Handbook, Dental Hygienists*, Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Healthcare/Dental-hygienists.htm>

State of Minnesota, U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (2013). CareerOneStop, Occupation Profile, Dental Hygienists. Retrieved from www.careerinfonet.org

University of New Mexico, Department of Dental Medicine (2013). *Program Information*. Retrieved from <http://dentalmedicine.unm.edu/>