The role and responsibility of the Dental Nurse

Dental Nurses are members of a group of dental care professionals (DCPs) who play a vital role within a dental team and provide support and assistance in clinical and non-clinical aspects of patient care.

A dental nurse is able to work in all branches of dentistry including general dental practice, hospital and community services, and within the armed forces.
The role of a dental nurse

The role of a dental nurse encompasses:

- Preparing and maintaining the dental equipment, instruments and materials within a dental surgery
- Carrying out infection control and decontamination procedures
- Recording dental charting carried out by clinicians
- Preparing, mixing and handling dental materials
- Providing chair-side support to dentists, therapists and hygienists throughout a range of dental procedures
- Providing support and reassurance to patients
- Providing administration support in making appointments, taking payments and dealing with paperwork.

An experienced dental nurse will use his/her knowledge of dentistry to anticipate what is needed during treatment sessions, a skill that is highly valued by the clinician.
Regulation and Professional Registration with the General Dental Council

The GDC is the organisation which regulates dental professionals in the United Kingdom. It is a legal requirement that all dentists, dental nurses, dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, dental hygienists, dental therapists and orthodontic therapists must be registered with the GDC in order to work in the United Kingdom. Dental nurses, dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, dental hygienists, dental hygienists and dental therapists are known as Dental Care Professionals (DCPs).

The GDC aims to protect patients within the United Kingdom by regulating dental staff, assuring the quality of dental education and setting standards for conduct that all dental professionals must adhere to.

Dental Nurses in training are temporarily exempt from this requirement but must be able to demonstrate that they are working towards one of the registerable qualifications on a recognised training programme. However students must abide by the GDC ‘Student Fitness to Practice’ guidelines and be able to demonstrate during their pre-registration training that they have the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of a dental care professional.

For more information on the GDC, access their website at www.gdc-uk.org
Training

Training will begin on the first working day in employment as a trainee dental nurse. In Scotland trainee dental nurses have the opportunity to complete a seven week induction programme through NHS Education for Scotland (NES). This enables new trainee dental nurses to gain the essential knowledge and skills to work safely in practice. Following induction candidates must register to commence a dental nurse pre-registration training programme.

The two registerable qualifications recognised by the General Dental Council (GDC) are:
• National Diploma in Dental Nursing, awarded by The National Examining Board for Dental Nurses (NEBDN)
• Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 3 in Dental Nursing, awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

These qualifications are awarded to dental nurses who have successfully achieved the qualification criteria. NHS Education for Scotland has five regional dental education centres delivering the SVQ Level 3 in Dental Nursing.

The Entry Requirements

Your local educational provider will stipulate any specific qualifications they require for registering in their training programme. Typical entry qualifications sought may include three standard grades at general level or three National Level 4 (N4) (SCQF level 4) in English, Maths and a science, for example: Biology.

Employers will expect a friendly, responsible attitude and positive approach to people. The dental nurse must be well presented and show a willingness to study, a team player, with good written and oral communication skills, excellent organisational skills and good manual dexterity.
Continuing Professional Development

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provides evidence that a registered DCP’s:

- Knowledge is up to date and relevant to practice
- Professional performance is up to the standards needed to maintain registration
- Behaviour meets the standard set out in the GDC’s guidance “Standards for the Dental Team”.

The GDC require that all registered DCPs complete at least 150 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) every five years to maintain registration.

CPD should include the following subjects:

- Medical Emergencies (at least 10 hours)
- Radiology and Radiation Protection (at least 5 hours)
- Disinfection and Decontamination (at least 5 hours)

The GDC also recommend that registrants keep up to date by doing CPD in the following areas:

- Legal and ethical issues
- Complaint handling
- Oral cancer early detection

Further Qualifications

There are a wide range of opportunities available to enable registered dental nurses to extend their clinical duties and develop their knowledge and skills within particular areas of interest, for example: dental radiography, oral health education, orthodontic dental nursing, special care dental nursing, taking dental impressions or the application of topical fluoride.
Contact details

The following regional contacts can provide information on training and development opportunities for DCPs in your area.

Lead DCP Tutor
Aberdeen Dental Education Centre
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Lead DCP Tutor
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