

TO: Dental Intern Offices/Supervising dentist or staff

FROM: Foothill College Dental Assisting Program

CC: Dental Assisting Students

SUBJECT: Internship Information

1. Responsibilities of the dental office/supervising dentist or staff

Dental assisting students are required to work in a dental office environment in order to be eligible for the RDA licensure exam at the completion of the program in June. When the student has completed the program and the required internship hours, he/she should be able to perform advanced RDA licensure duties as outlined by the California State Dental Practice Act. All of these tasks are taught to at least laboratory competency at Foothill College. Therefore, it is ideal for the supervising dental office to introduce these tasks in a clinical environment, demonstrate how to perform the tasks and allow the dental assisting student to perform these tasks. The least ideal situation is when the student performs low-level tasks such as cleaning, vacuuming, dusting, sterilization, etc., for a majority of the time. Another less than ideal situation can happen when students are requested to perform a task that is clearly outlined in the California State dental practice act as beyond the RDA's scope of practice. This includes scaling/root planning, carving dental amalgam, polishing composite restorations with sandpaper discs, placing dental sealants, permanent cementation or adjustment of crowns/bridges – to mention a few.

2. Communication

Dental assisting students who intern in a dental office should be treated as an employee. If a student arrives late to the office, someone should immediately speak to the student and document the tardiness on the attendance form. Other undesirable behavior, habits, problems should be discussed openly and immediately with the student so the student is aware of the problem. It is also very important to inform the Foothill College Clinical Supervisor as soon as possible of any problems that are encountered. If necessary, the clinical supervisor will take action in consultation with the dental office, the student, and/or the program director.

The dental assisting student looks to the dentist and dental office staff to set a high professional standard. It can be very difficult for the student when the student is placed in the middle of a “turf war” between individuals in the dental office or when office staff speak in a negative manner concerning other individuals in the practice. Students may be pressured to “choose sides” or agree with another individual's comments. This type of communication is disheartening to many students and places the student in a very uncomfortable situation. Please help the students view dental assisting and their career choice with a positive outlook.

3. Recommended progression of learning

Dental assisting students learn basic chairside dental assisting terminology, instruments and equipment in Fall quarter (September to December). Infection control, OSHA and hazardous waste management is also covered in Fall quarter. Oral evacuation and instrument transfer is taught within the first three weeks of the quarter. Basic general procedures i.e. amalgam, composite, crown and bridge and instruments are also covered in Fall quarter. The students attend a rotation at the UCSF School of Dentistry for the last 2 Thursdays in the quarter to observe and /or assist dental students to reinforce the information taught in class. Traditional radiography techniques with a XCP and developing solutions are taught in Fall quarter.

In Winter quarter (January to March), the dental assisting students learn about specialty topics such as basic orthodontics, oral surgery, periodontal treatment and procedures. On Tuesdays and Thursdays in Winter quarter, the dental assisting students work with dental students, faculty and staff at UCSF School of Dentistry. Assisting students are also allowed to observe and/or assist in the specialty clinics at the dental school. Students receive an orientation and are introduced to the digital x-ray system using the sensor with the cord.

In Spring quarter (April to June), the dental assisting students learn advanced dental assisting skills such as coronal polishing and fabrication of temporary crowns. In Spring quarter, students should have a brief observation period and should perform as much “hands-on” intraoral procedures as possible. At Foothill, the students learn how to take digital x-rays using phosphor plates including panorex. Supplemental film techniques are also taught i.e. distal molar, occlusal and endo films.

Students take radiology in Fall, Winter and Spring. Bitewing films are taken on patients in Winter quarter and full mouth series are taken in spring quarter. Students are also taught how to take distal molars, occlusals, panoramic and head films. Each student is at a different level of proficiency for taking x-rays on actual patients. Therefore, the radiology instructors may allow one or more students to place the x-ray film, expose the film, and develop the film. However, some students will not be allowed to expose the film until a higher level of proficiency is met during instruction at the college. Regardless, each dental office should give a thorough orientation and carefully supervise students during radiology procedures – an unfamiliar darkroom can be potential for disaster.

4. Intern evaluation

The dental assisting student intern will receive a cumulative grade for the office rotation. This grade is a compilation of data and feedback by the clinical site, the supervising clinical instructor, attendance records, and amount of “hands-on” time. The students are aware of the evaluation process and procedures and may ask for someone in your dental office to complete the evaluation forms. The person who completes the evaluation forms should be someone who has worked with the student on a consistent basis (RDA or dentist). After completing the appropriate evaluation forms, the dental office evaluator should review with the student the completed evaluation and obtain the student’s signature. It is important that the evaluations are completed on a timely basis and that the evaluation is completed in a honest and fair manner. It does not benefit the student if the dental office evaluation gives above average grades but the office complains to the clinical instructor. Situations like these can cause a great deal of confusion and ill will.

5. Hiring student interns

Students are not to be paid for their required internship hours. Although the students are not yet licensed as an RDA, the students who are completing their dental office internship rotations can perform RDA functions as outlined in the state dental practice act. During the internship rotations, the students are covered under the malpractice insurance purchased by the student from the Foothill-De Anza Community College District. The dental office can make arrangements with the student to work on a paid part-time position as long as the paid position is scheduled on days or evenings other than the scheduled internship days/hours. Please note that a student receiving payment is considered a dental assistant limited to the scope and practice outlined in the dental practice act. The student should not be allowed to perform RDA duties/functions.