A FUTURE IN ORAL HEALTH
Oral health is an important component of our general health and wellbeing. This is not only because a bright white smile looks healthy, but because an individual’s dental and periodontal (disease of the gums) conditions can impact on many aspects of their overall health. Dental decay and periodontal disease remain among the most prevalent diseases in New Zealand and globally.

Oral diseases are problematic because they often have a relationship with other conditions or circumstances (risk factors) in the body. For example, systemic diseases in the oral cavity might indicate the presence of these diseases elsewhere in the body, medications may have side effects that affect the oral cavity or periodontal infection may cause problems with stabilising diabetes.

Dental hygienists and dental therapists are oral health professionals who provide clinical care as well as oral health education to individuals or groups. The main focus for dental therapists is restorative oral health care for children and adolescents up to the age of 18. Dental hygienists focus on periodontal care for all ages, usually alongside a dentist, and primarily in private practice. AUT graduates are dual qualified practitioners, which means they are trained to work in both scopes of practice as dental therapists and dental hygienists.

Are you keen to help people maintain good oral health? Are you interested in making a difference to the health of people and communities? Do you enjoy working in a team setting? Are you interested in human biology? Are you empathetic and caring?

If so, oral health may offer an interesting career path for you.
WORK SETTINGS

Dental therapists and dental hygienists work in teams alongside dentists, specialists, singly qualified dental hygienists and/or dental therapists, oral health educators, and other health care professionals.

Dental therapists work mainly in school and community settings. Dental hygienists work mainly in private practice, as well as community settings, including aged care.

Public health service – Dental therapist and dental hygienists are employed by District Health Boards (DHBs) in hospital or community clinics, alongside dentists. These services are free of charge to patients. Working for the DHBs involves travelling to hub clinics to provide child and adolescent dental care, or working in mobile clinics for screening and preventive treatment for children and adolescents.

Private practice – Dental hygienists may be employed in private practice, working with dentists, prosthodontists, maxillo-facial surgeons and orthodontic specialists. They may also be engaged by retirement villages and hospitals to provide preventive services to residents.

Once they have experience, dental hygienists can set up their own practice or work on contract to dental providers.
CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

**Dental therapists:** Provide oral health assessment, oral disease prevention, education and instruction, treatment and management services for children and adolescents up to age of 18. They provide options for improving and maintaining oral health, particularly for dental disease.

**Dental hygienists:** Provide oral health assessment, oral disease prevention, education and instruction, treatment and management services for patients of all ages. They provide options for improving and maintaining oral health, particularly for periodontal disease.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

**Critical thinking skills**
- High level of oral disease knowledge and risk factor interaction
- Ability to analyse, research and apply theoretical knowledge to individual patient care and the promotion of oral health
- Ability to set goals with perceived outcomes and reassess success of oral health intervention

**Communication and people skills**
- Ability to work collaboratively in a team environment and with community groups
- Ability to act in an empathetic way with people who are concerned about their health and support their behaviour change

**Physical skills**
- Excellent finger dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination
- Ability to visualise 3D dental anatomical environment

**Personal attributes**
- Strong interest in oral health and links to general health
- Empathetic and good at relating at an appropriate level to people of all ages
- Organised, with attention to detail and an ability to work in a disciplined and systematic way

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Graduates register with the Dental Council of New Zealand, then apply yearly for an annual practising certificate (APC) that requires adhering to a Scope(s) of Practice.

More information on oral health professional registration requirements can be found at www.dcnz.org.nz

SALARY GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dental therapist</td>
<td>1-4 years’ experience: $41,000-$62,000 pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 5 years’ with extra responsibilities: $58,000-$95,000 pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental hygienist</td>
<td>hourly rate $30-$60 per hour, depending on location and experience. Can be an employee or self-employed in full-time or part-time positions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: DHB/PSA Collective Agreement, and Emigrate New Zealand, Careers NZ and www.enz.org/salary-dental-occupations.html

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (mid 2015) and should only be used as a guideline.

THE AUT ADVANTAGE

Graduates of AUT’s Bachelor of Health Science (Oral Health) degree are dual-trained oral health practitioners who may register as both dental hygienists and dental therapists with the Dental Council of New Zealand to work in New Zealand and Australia. They are sought after in both countries.

As well as ongoing external clinical placements, AUT students get extensive clinical experience in AUT’s campus based oral health service.

They also work on oral health promotion planning and participation in the wider community.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study is available in oral health at postgraduate, master’s and PhD level.

Examples of current research include:
- Improving the survival of oral cancer patients in New Zealand
- Salivary hypofunction
- Effect of Vitamin D supplementation during pregnancy and infancy on dental health in early childhood.
I am in my third year working as a dental therapist at Flaxmere Community Dental Clinic where I work with the local community to prevent oral diseases, both caries (decay) and periodontal disease (gum disease).

I am currently working specifically with children, mostly using my therapist scope of practice. But I have a day set aside each week for hygiene patients. I also usually have a pre-schoolers day on Wednesday, but am open to any ‘relief of pain’ calls on that day. The rest of the week is booked up with a mixture of recalls and treatment.

I am also involved in an incubator programme led by the hospital involving students from Hawke's Bay high schools. The workshops aim to encourage teenagers to take on health-related careers by giving them information about what subjects to do at school and how university works.

I am also part of the Choose Water Hawke’s Bay group. We are currently working on introducing policies to schools about having less or no sugar and sweetened beverages.

I enjoy my job because I am passionate about Māori oral health. I also like how I am still learning every day.

JAIMEE EDWARDS  Ngāti Kahungunu, Whakatōhea
Dual-qualified Dental Therapist and Dental Hygienist, Hawke's Bay DHB
Bachelor of Health Science (Oral Health)

EMPLOYER COMMENT

“The dual roles of dental hygienist and dental therapist in AUT graduates is quite innovative and attractive to us when we look ahead at changes in our service at the DHB.

AUT graduates have solid clinical experience and experience of working with a range of different cultures so they understand cultural aspects, needs and perspective. They are well equipped to meet the needs of the profession.”

Ruth O’Rourke
Clinical Team Leader of Oral Health Services, Hawke's Bay District Health Board
USEFUL WEBSITES

New Zealand Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association (NZDOHTA)
www.nzoral.org.nz

New Zealand Dental Hygiene Association (NZDHA)
www.nzdha.co.nz

New Zealand Dental Association
www.nzda.org.nz

Ministry of Health

Auckland DHB Oral Health Service – Regional Service

FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up to date information on Oral Health and the Bachelor of Health Science, please visit our website: www.aut.ac.nz/oral-health

FUTURE STUDENTS
Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: www.aut.ac.nz/enquire
futurestudents@aut.ac.nz
@AUTFutureStudents

CURRENT AUT STUDENTS
Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)
www.aut.ac.nz/enquire | studenthub@aut.ac.nz
@AUTEmployabilityandCareers

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS
For other Future Career Sheets visit:
www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets
For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through https://elab.aut.ac.nz/

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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, August 2019.