
COMPETENCIES FOR THE GRADUATE/ENTRY-LEVEL DENTAL HYGIENIST COMPETENCY DOMAINS

Introduction

The Dental Hygiene program at Harper College has defined the knowledge, skills, and values required for entry in the profession of dental hygiene. This document, *Competencies for the Entry-Level Dental Hygienist* organizes the knowledge, skills and values that the graduate must acquire to become a competent entry-level dental hygiene practitioner. The competencies address patient care, professional service, life-long learning, and scientific inquiry.

These competencies serve to define the core content of the curriculum, thereby establishing the basis for content of all courses, guiding decisions regarding course content depth and breadth, curriculum sequencing, and the use of meaningful pedagogy and educational methodologies.

These competencies are used to assess the degree to which students can meet or exceed the defined standards of dental hygiene patient care. Students must demonstrate achievement of these competencies in order to graduate from the Dental Hygiene program.

These competencies must be responsive to the changing needs of the professional environment so it is recognized that this document will require ongoing review to continual improvement and ensure relevancy.

Organization of the Competencies

The model depicts three competency domains representing broad categories of the dental hygiene care process. The concept of domains is intended to encourage an interdisciplinary structure and process in the dental hygiene curriculum. Competencies are listed from the general to specific.

Domains

Professionalism and Ethics: Professionalism and Ethics encompass all aspects of dental hygiene care. This includes ethics, values, skill, knowledge integral to all aspects of dental hygiene care and the ability for self-evaluation. A dental hygienist must possess transferable skills in communication, problem-solving, self-evaluation and critical thinking. The competent dental hygiene practitioner provides skilled care using the highest professional knowledge, judgment, and ability. This skilled care should be based on contemporary knowledge, and the practitioner should be capable of discerning and managing ethical issues and problems in the practice of dental hygiene.

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: Changes within the health-care environment require the dental hygienist to have a general knowledge of wellness, health determinants, and characteristics of various patient/patient communities. The hygienist must focus on disease prevention and evaluation measures to ensure effective health care delivery. The dental hygienist plays an active role in the promotion of optimal oral health and its relationship to general health and, therefore, must be competent in the performance and delivery of oral health promotion and disease prevention services in the public health, private practice, and alternative settings.

Patient Care: The dental hygienist is a licensed preventive oral health professional who provides educational and clinical services in the support of optimal oral health. The dental hygiene process of care applies principles from the biomedical, clinical, and social sciences to diverse populations that may include the medically compromised, mentally or physically challenged, or socially or culturally disadvantaged.

Because the dental hygienist's role in patient/patient care is ever changing, yet central to the maintenance of health, dental hygiene graduates must use their skills in a comprehensive way to *assess*, systematically collecting and integrating data on the general and oral health status of the patient; to *diagnosis*, i.e., provide a dental hygiene diagnosis which analyzes the patient's general and oral health status, is complimentary with the diagnosis of dentists and other health care professionals, and assesses its relationship to dental hygiene care and oral health status. The dental hygienist must *plan* which includes identification of goals, treatment procedures, priorities and patient involvement to facilitate optimal oral health, *implement* the plan including the delivery of care, and provide education to assist the patient in achieving oral health goals with ongoing *evaluation* of the effectiveness of the comprehensive care plan.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

COMPETENCIES FOR THE GRADUATE/ENTRY-LEVEL DENTAL HYGIENIST

Students who successfully complete this program are able to

Patient Care

1. utilize the dental hygiene process of care in provision of comprehensive, quality patient care.

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

2. provide individualized patient educational services to promote health maintenance and disease prevention.

3. individually and/or in collaboration with health care professionals, apply the dental hygiene process of care in planning and providing oral health related programs to the public.

Professionalism and Ethics

4. use evidence-based research to critically evaluate the validity of foundational knowledge, information, products and/or techniques and their relevance to the practice of dental hygiene.
5. apply principles of ethical reasoning, ethical decision making, and critical thinking as they pertain to the academic environment, research, patient care and dental hygiene practice, and demonstrate professional responsibility as it applies to the legal and regulatory concepts in the provision and/or support of oral health care services.
6. perform self-assessment, monitor knowledge and performance, and take corrective action to address deficiencies.
7. demonstrate cultural sensitivity and the interpersonal and communication skills required for effective functioning with diverse population groups and other members of the health care team.
8. demonstrate professional growth by participating in professional activities and continuing education.