

Dental therapist



What do dental therapists do?

Dental therapists provide dental care to children, adolescents and young adults.

Dental therapists:

- examine the teeth and mouth and prepare a care plan
- provide oral health care advice
- take x-rays and impressions
- do fillings, restore teeth and remove deciduous teeth
- provide preventive dental care such as dental sealants and fluoride therapies
- provide some orthodontic procedures
- refer people who need further treatment to another dental professional
- promote oral health in the community.

What skills do dental therapists need?

Dental therapists require proficient practical and technical skills as well as good problem-solving and decision-making skills. They should enjoy working with children and young people, and they require excellent people skills to communicate easily and clearly with a range of people. They must have a consultative approach to work as a member of the dental team. Dental therapists need to be patient, calm and friendly. They should be able to inspire confidence in their clients and encourage positive attitudes to oral health.

'When a child comes in with a lot of problems I like working on that child and seeing treatment right through to the end. To be able to see someone needing treatment and being able to provide that treatment is very rewarding.' Jen, School Dental Service, Barwon

Where do dental therapists work?

Dental therapists may work in public dental clinics in hospitals, community health centres, mobile dental vans or in private dental practices. Dental therapists work in a

team environment alongside a dental assistant and other dental clinicians. They have contact with a wide range of people including children and their parents or carers, community groups, teachers, dental team members and other health professionals.

Dental therapists can also be employed in research, management, education and policy development roles.

What are the working conditions and career prospects?

Dental therapists usually work regular hours with excellent working conditions. Flexible employment arrangements, such as part-time work, are also available. The career prospects for dental therapists are excellent. There is an increasing demand for people employed in this occupation and there are many job opportunities in metropolitan and rural Victoria. The role of dental therapists is continually expanding.

'I've worked in four Australian states as a therapist. I have always been able to pick up work everywhere I've been and have always found my skills have been valued.' Anne, Manager, Western School Dental Service

How do I become a dental therapist?

Dental therapists complete a three-year degree.

The University of Melbourne offers the Bachelor of Oral Health which provides a dual qualification in dental therapy and oral hygiene. Prospective students must undertake the Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admissions Test (UMAT), however this prerequisite will change from 2008. Selection for the course is based on a combination of the applicant's ENTER, performance in the UMAT (before 2008) and performance in prerequisite subjects. Detailed information is published by the university and available on the web at www.dent.unimelb.edu.au, or you can call (03) 9341 1500.

La Trobe University commenced the Bachelor of Oral Health Science at its Bendigo campus in 2006. The course provides a dual qualification in dental therapy and oral hygiene. Selection is based on a combination of the applicant's ENTER and performance in prerequisite subjects. The UMAT is not required for this course. For more information contact the School of Human Biosciences on (03) 5444 7411.

Both Universities offer scholarship places which cover the student's contribution for a Commonwealth supported place across the entire degree.

Want more information?

More information is available at the following websites:

- **Dentistry in Victoria:** www.health.vic.gov.au/dentistry
 - Find out what dental therapists have to say about their jobs
 - Find more fact sheets about other careers in dentistry
- **Victorian Dental Therapists Association:** www.vdta.org.au
 - Find more information about working as a dental therapist
- **University of Melbourne:** www.dent.unimelb.edu.au
 - Find out more about the course for dental therapists
- **La Trobe University:** www.latrobe.edu.au/humanbio
 - Find out more about the course for dental therapists.

Your careers adviser can also provide further information.