



**Professional Profile
Dental Hygiene**



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1. Introduction

The dental hygiene profession is subjected to and is an integral part of dynamic and innovative surroundings. Progressive medical and dental research and development is transforming the role of a dental hygienist into an increasingly complex and multifaceted profession. The following professional profile provides a comprehensive overview of the dental hygiene profession, the educational and continuing education options, the statutory guidelines and the Swiss Dental Hygienists professional association.

This professional profile addresses itself to members of the profession, political entities, public authorities, education providers, and also collaborators and interested parties. It contributes towards ongoing quality development within the profession thereby enhancing its recognition and position among medical professions.

Swiss Dental Hygienists reviews their professional profile at regular intervals and adapts it to the changes and requirements of its collaborating health organizations.



2. The profession in brief

A registered dental hygienist performs dental hygiene care, which denotes all caries and periodontitis preventive treatments, carries out non-surgical and supportive periodontal treatments and engages in the promotion of oral and general health of the patients. She supports and encourages her patients to assume responsibility for their personal oral hygiene and instructs them with individual preventive measures. The goal is to minimize future reconstructive dental treatments.

A registered dental hygienist recognizes pathological changes in the gingival tissues, periodontium, teeth, tongue and the mucous membrane in the oral cavity. She assumes advisory, maintenance and associated functions in prevention and therapy, as well as in the aesthetic-cosmetic field. She provides information on causes, consequences and therapy options. She consults the dentist on examinations and treatments that are outside her sphere of competence.

The registered dental hygienist, independently, organizes, plans and implements therapeutic procedures and the recall. Her dental hygiene treatment is coordinated with the dentist's overall treatment plan supporting a practice concept. The evidence-based practice of dental hygiene is about choosing healthcare measures that are supported by current research taking into consideration the specific clinical findings and the individual needs of each patient. The dental hygienist not only treats and provides cares for healthy patients, but also acute and long-term patients and patients with various disabilities. Patients may belong to all age and socio-economic groups or stem from various cultural backgrounds. In the case of patients with medical-risk, the registered dental hygienist is required to consult a dental or medical professional prior to implementing treatment.

The registered dental hygienist works in different institutional settings. She can exercise her profession in a practice team or work on a self-employed basis in her own practice working in accordance with statutory guidelines.

The registered dental hygienist bears responsibility for her own work and respects medical and dental responsibilities described in statutory and practice acts and/or regulations.

The graduate dental hygienist delegates organizational tasks and tasks relating to hygiene and/or prophylaxis to dental assistants, prophylaxis assistants and oral hygiene instructors in public schools, and monitors their correct implementation. Upon request, she will advise those working in healthcare and in public education institutions on dental hygiene issues.

3. Duties and skills of a registered dental hygienist

To perform the duties of a registered dental hygienists calls for a comprehensive knowledge in demanding medical and scientific disciplines. The dental hygienist requires extremely good manual dexterity in view of the specific fine-motor instrumentation techniques used in her work. Her daily work is constantly influenced by current results from research and development. High-level social skills are essential if she is to achieve the goals of her professional challenges. A holistic and interdisciplinary approach is therefore required in the dental hygiene profession.

Patient care

- The dental hygienist exhibits concern for the welfare of the patients she examines and treats.
- The daily work of the dental hygienist is characterized by treatment that calls for a high level of discretion and ethic toward patients.
- The dental hygienist documents the individual needs and life's circumstances of the patients.
- She informs patients of scientific findings, preventive and health promoting measures in a comprehensible manner.
- She takes care to apply effective, efficient and cost-conscious treatment methods.

Patient treatment

- The dental hygienist accesses and documents the clinical findings necessary for treatment planning.
- She conducts clinical and radiological examinations of patients and recognizes pathological changes in the gingival tissues, periodontium, teeth, tongue and the mucous membrane in the oral cavity.
- The dental hygienist interprets her findings and draws up an individual treatment and maintenance plan in consultation with the patient. The primary dental care provider's overall treatment concept is then taken into account before treatment is implemented.
- She conducts non-surgical periodontal treatment and removes plaque and calculus from tooth and root surfaces.
- The dental hygienist motivates and instructs patients to strive for optimal personal oral hygiene.

- She delivers nutritional advice with a bearing on oral health and incorporates interventions for smoking cessation.
- She polishes reconstructions (fillings, crowns, bridges).
- She applies pit and fissure sealants.
- She removes surface stains, applies topical fluorides and desensitizing agents to exposed (dentin) tooth necks.
- She performs professional, external tooth bleaching procedures.
- She observes the recommended quality standards.
- The dental hygienist consults a dental or medical professional prior to the treatment of patients with medical-risk.

Clinical practice in a dental team and a multidisciplinary setting

The dental hygienist ensures the flow of information between the patient and the dentist and channels communication with other healthcare specialists and specialists in other disciplines.

She delegates work within her competencies to dental assistants and prophylaxis assistants.

Infection control

The dental hygienist observes practice hygiene guidelines for infection control for the protection of patients, third parties and herself.

Research and Development

The dental hygienist assists in the evaluation and development of dental devices, instruments and products.

She recognizes the need for lifelong learning and stays abreast through reading professional literature.

Public relations

The dental hygienist makes a key contribution to increasing the awareness of the population to maintain good oral hygiene by actively participating in professional organizations and health-promotion campaigns.





4. Requirements of a registered dental hygienist

- has an interest in dental issues and the promotion of oral health
- enjoys working with people of different genders , ages and from different cultures, etc.
- good observation skills
- good manual dexterity
- empathy, understanding of human nature and patience
- readiness to engage in lifelong learning
- follows the codes of ethic
- interrelated thinking
- ability to interact, cooperate and communicate
- problems solving skills
- works independently and professionally
- flexibility, adaptability
- mental and physical resilience
- leadership ability and an interest in business administration



5. Education

Switzerland has four educational institutions offering PET diploma courses in dental hygiene. The curriculum takes three years to complete (5400 hours of study) or 4500 hours of study for dental assistants who already hold a Swiss VET diploma; the course comprises 50% theory and 50% practical instruction.

The education is categorized at a higher vocational level (PET college/tertiary level B). Admission requirements are: a diploma or certificate from an upper secondary school or upper secondary/college preparatory school, a baccalaurate or equivalent educational qualifications. The curriculum is ranked at level 6 of the national and European Qualification Framework.

Training Colleges:

Bern

Medi; Zentrum für medizinische
Bildung
Max-Daetwyler-Platz 2
3014 Bern
Fon 031 537 31 40
Fax 031 537 31 39
www.medi.ch
dh@medi.ch

Zurich

Careum Bildungszentrum
Gloriastrasse 16
8006 Zürich
Fon 043 222 52 00
Fax 043 222 52 05
www.careum-bildungszentrum.ch
bildungszentrum@careum.ch

Geneva

École Supérieure d'Hygiénistes
Dentaires
Boulevard de la Cluse 16
1205 Genève
Fon 022 388 35 00
Fax 022 388 35 67
www.eshyd.ch
echid@etat.ge.ch

Zurich

Prophylaxe Zentrum Zürich PZZ
Höhere Fachschule für Dentalhygiene
Herzogenmühlestrasse 14/20
8051 Zürich
Fon 044 325 15 00
Fax 044 325 15 02
www.pszn.ch
sekretariat@prophylaxezentrum.ch

6. Continuing education

Ongoing scientific research in the field of dentistry contributes new findings that have to be incorporated into the day-to-day of a dental hygienist. The dental hygienist commits herself to the principles of lifelong learning and to maintain the competency needed in her professional settings.

The professional organization, namely Swiss Dental Hygienists, education providers, specialist societies, universities, and also private institutions, offer opportunities for regular continuing education.

The main continuing education courses to be pursued by dental hygienists are those offering an update, refresher or renewal:

- in dental specialties and /or medical continuing education
- for character building and professionalism
- in complementary medicine
- in methods and didactics
- in business administration

Continuing education courses are constantly reviewed and adapted in order to prepare the dental hygienist for new challenges in expanded duties and clinical competencies. Such an example would be courses offered in administering infiltration anesthesia.

After completing additional advanced continuing education, a dental hygienist has the option of employment with education providers teaching theory and clinical courses or employment in a school management capacity.

Dental hygienists can increasingly contribute their broaden knowledge for the dental industry. They also can assume high-ranking positions in dental education.

7. Work settings of a registered dental hygienist

The registered dental hygienist functions in a dental or medical team, in private practices, universities, hospitals, nursing homes, industry, public services, schools, health centers and for education providers. She can exercise her profession in a practice team or on a self-employed basis in her own practice, working in accordance with statutory guidelines.

The following options are available for practicing the profession:

- as an employed registered dental hygienist
- as an economically independent registered dental hygienist in a group practice
- as a self-employed registered dental hygienist in her own practice

Collaboration within the dental team

The registered dental hygienist works independently in her expert capacity. She assumes a pivoting function within the dental team by calling upon the dentist or other professionals to perform further treatment and delegating specific work to dental or prophylaxis assistants.

Interdisciplinary collaboration

The registered dental hygienists functions on an interdisciplinary basis with dentists, doctors, other professionals and healthcare providers. In multidisciplinary teams, e.g. in nursing homes or hospitals, the registered dental hygienist is consulted as a specialist.

8. Statutory Guidelines

The professional title «dipl. Dentalhygienikerin HF» or Registered Dental Hygienist (Dental Hygienist with a PET College Diploma) is recognized throughout Switzerland as per Art. 75 of the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Ordinance. The education is governed by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). A “Registered Dental Hygienist” holds an Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education and is entitled to use RDH behind her name.

Members of the profession from abroad may obtain a work permit provided they have achieved equivalent educational qualifications.

The Radiation Protection Act and the corresponding Ordinance govern training and application in the field of radiology.

The Therapeutic Products Act and the Cantonal Ordinances govern the use of medications.

The cantonal health legislation and Ordinances governs the practice of the profession on a self-employed basis.

9. The Swiss Dental Hygienists professional association

The professional organization was founded as the «Schweizerische Dentalhygienikerinnen-Verband (SDHV)» in 1975, two years after the first dental hygiene college opened in Zurich. In 2001 the professional organization was renamed the Swiss Dental Hygienists.

Swiss Dental Hygienists represents the professional, economic and social interests of its members and is committed to future-oriented education and continuing education. As a professional and specialist association, Swiss Dental Hygienists strongly supports quality-oriented professional practice.

Swiss Dental Hygienists is managed on a national basis by a Governing Board working voluntarily and is divided into seven regional sections.

Swiss Dental Hygienists is certified with the NPO Label awarded by SQS/VMI for NPO Management Excellence.

10. Prospects and Visions

As we know, the findings from research and science has proven to have a profound influence on oral disease and on general health and well-being of the population. Correlations are known in the case of cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, underweight premature births, immune and inflammatory diseases. The early detection of oral and general-medical disorders plays an important role in dental hygiene treatment concepts. In this respect, the dental hygienist holds a key position in her profession and makes a major contribution to the promotion of general health, in turn leading to a reduction in healthcare costs. It is thus indispensable for dental hygienists to be involved in activities and projects in the health sector as well as in scientific research.

The demographic change that is coming about, with an ageing population, requires more qualified specialists in dental hygiene.

The emerging trend towards an increasing number of minimal invasive, i.e. non-aggressive and painless, treatments call for new treatment techniques and the continuous development of improved instruments and devices. Here again, a registered dental hygienist can make a significant contribution by drawing from her higher education and comprehensive practical experience in the implementation of new treatment concepts and methods.

The increasingly stringent requirements on dental hygienist require that they receive a more than adequate education. This presents the necessity for continuous adaptations in curriculums and placing continuing education objectives at high priority. The connection to international continuing education options must therefore be guaranteed.

11. Additional information

- **Swiss Dental Hygienists:**
www.dentalhygienists.ch
- **IFDH**, International Federation of Dental Hygienists:
www.ifdh.org
- **EDHF**, European Dental Hygienists Federation:
www.edhf.org
- **SSO**, Swiss Dental Association:
www.sso.ch
- **SSP**, Swiss Society for Periodontology:
www.parodontologie.ch
- **SGZBB**, Swiss Society for Gerodontology and Special Care:
www.sgzbb.ch
- **Swiss Implant Foundation:**
www.implantstiftung.ch
- **SERI**, State Secretariat for Education Research and Innovation:
www.seri.admin.ch
- **Oda Santé**, National Organisation of the Healthcare Workplace:
www.odasante.ch

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