

Essential Functions for Dental Hygiene/Dental Assisting Practice

These essential functions/technical standards describe the tasks and functions necessary to demonstrate proficiency as a Dental Hygienist/Dental Assistant (RDH/EFDA).

Functional Ability	Standard	Examples of Required Activities
Gross motor skills, fine motor skills and mobility	Gross and fine motor abilities are sufficient to provide safe and effective dental care. Ability to maneuver in small clinical spaces with precision and coordination.	• Move efficiently within operatory, sterilization, and radiology areas • Position self and patient appropriately for treatment • Maintain ergonomic posture while performing procedures • Use hand instruments, ultrasonic scalers, and dental equipment with precision • Transfer instruments without compromising sterility or safety
Physical endurance and strength	Physical stamina sufficient to remain on task for extended clinical sessions involving standing, sitting, bending, and repetitive motions.	• Maintain clinical performance for extended appointments (2–8+ hours) • Sit or stand for prolonged periods during procedures • Lift/move dental equipment and supplies (up to ~25–50 lbs) • Perform repetitive hand and wrist movements (scaling, polishing, assisting)
Hearing	Auditory ability is sufficient to monitor patient needs and clinical equipment.	• Hear patient responses, distress, or discomfort • Recognize equipment sounds (suction, handpieces, alarms) • Respond to verbal instructions from dentists, instructors, and team members
Visual	Visual acuity sufficient for accurate assessment and treatment, including close detail and color differentiation.	• Detect calculus, biofilm, inflammation, and oral abnormalities • Read charts, radiographs, and instrument markings • Distinguish subtle color changes in tissues and materials • Interpret radiographic findings
Smell	Ability to detect odors that may indicate clinical concerns.	• Recognize odors associated with infection or disease • Detect chemical or material changes (e.g., disinfectants, dental materials)
Emotional/ Behavioral	Emotional stability and professional behavior are	• Maintain composure in stressful or emergency situations

	necessary for safe patient care and teamwork.	• Demonstrate accountability for actions and clinical decisions • Adapt to diverse patient populations and needs • Apply critical thinking and problem-solving in clinical care
Professional attitudes, communication, and interpersonal skills	Effective communication and professional demeanor with patients, faculty, and healthcare team.	• Establish rapport with patients and team members • Provide clear patient education and instructions • Communicate effectively in written and verbal formats • Maintain professionalism, confidentiality, and ethical standards • Follow directions and adhere to clinical protocols
Numerical Abilities	Ability to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, and apply clinical information.	• Record accurate charting and periodontal measurements • Calculate medication dosages and anesthetic amounts • Interpret patient health histories and vital signs • Apply knowledge to develop patient care plans
Safety	Ability to adhere to infection control and safety standards.	• Consistently use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): gloves, masks, eyewear, gowns • Follow OSHA, CDC, and clinical safety protocols • Maintain aseptic technique • Safely handle sharps and hazardous materials

- I acknowledge that I have read and understand the Essential Functions for the Dental Hygiene/Dental Assisting Program provided by Horry-Georgetown Technical College
- I acknowledge that if I am unable to demonstrate any of the technical standards and essential functions, it is my responsibility to contact the Office of Disability Services immediately upon submission of program application at (843) 349-5249 and initiate the process for requesting reasonable accommodations, if needed. I understand that I must independently demonstrate competency in clinical settings.
- I acknowledge that demonstrating proficiency in these technical standards is essential to success in clinical/affiliate sites and that I must independently demonstrate proficiency in clinical/affiliate sites to complete my certificate, diploma, or degree.

Student Name _____ H# _____ Date _____

References

- Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Programs and Dental Hygiene Programs
- Dental Assisting National Board (DANB). Certification Competency Requirements
- American Dental Association (ADA). Dental Hygienist Career Overview
- American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA). Standards for Clinical Dental Hygiene Practice
- American Dental Education Association (ADEA). Roles of the Dental Hygienist
- American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA). Professional Roles and Code of Ethics