



BRITISH ORTHODONTIC SOCIETY

ADVICE SHEET

DENTAL NURSE COMPETENCIES IN ORTHODONTIC PRACTICE



Introduction

This advice sheet is intended to provide guidance on the scope of practice of dental and orthodontic nurses. It also gives advice on how to extend the experience and competencies of staff by establishing courses and the regulations involved. A useful list of contacts is given in order to further guide the reader.

The dental nurse

A dental nurse is a dental care professional who provides nursing and clinical support in dental practice in primary, secondary and tertiary settings. All dental nurses (with the exception of trainees) must be registered with the General Dental Council and hold a Certificate in Dental Nursing and hold appropriate indemnity insurance for the role. The Scope of Practice document from the General Dental Council states: Dental nurses are registered dental professionals who provide clinical and other support to registrants and patients. A qualified dental nurse is competent to:

- Prepare and maintain the clinical environment, including the equipment.
- Carry out infection prevention and control procedures to prevent physical, chemical and microbiological contamination in the surgery or laboratory.
- Record dental charting and oral tissue assessment carried out by other registrants.
- Prepare, mix and handle dental bio-materials.
- Provide chair-side support to the operator during treatment, keep full, accurate and contemporaneous patient records.
- Prepare equipment, materials and patients for dental radiography.

- Process dental radiographs.
- Monitor, support and reassure patients.
- Give appropriate patient advice.
- Support their colleagues.
- Assist in providing life support when there is a medical emergency.
- Make appropriate referrals to other health professionals.

Recognised dental nursing qualifications are provided by a number of authorities and organisations in the United Kingdom. At present, a list would include:

- National Examining Board for Dental Nurses, NEBDN.
- Council for Awards in Care Health and Education, CACHE.
- City & Guilds Institute.
- Scottish Qualifications Authority, SQA.
- Cardiff University.
- Portsmouth University.
- Teesside University.
- University of Northampton.
- Bangor University.
- Dental Team Qualifications.

Some current qualifications are:

- NVQ Level 3 in Dental Nursing.
- Level 3 VRQ in Dental Nursing.
- QCF Level 3 Diploma in Dental Nursing.
- Higher National Certificate in Dental Nursing.
- National Diploma for Dental Nurses..
- National Certificate in Dental Nursing.
- Scottish Qualification Authority Level 3 SQA. City & Guilds.
- NEBDS SVQ Level 3 in Dental Nursing.
- NVQ Level 3 Oral Health Care Awarded by SQA.

Education and Higher Education in the UK is now stratified in a 'framework' to allow comparison between the various levels of training and qualification, within an area of study and between quite different areas of study. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the scale has 8 points and in Scotland, 12 points. Essential educational achievement ranks at level 1 and a doctorate thesis ranks at level 8 and level 12 in Scotland.

At present, dental nursing qualifications are at level 4-5, in the space between 'A' Level examinations and Scottish Advanced Higher examinations and a University Bachelor's degree.

However, there is a significant upwards pressure. Some universities are offering a Foundation Degree (FdSc) in Dental Nursing. In due course, New College (Lanarkshire) with the University of Stirling intend to offer a BSc degree in Dental Nursing set at academic level 9 (Scotland) and equivalent in academic standing to a Bachelor's Ordinary Degree.

The orthodontic nurse

An orthodontic nurse is a dental nurse who works in orthodontic practice. Their scope of practice is the same as the dental nurse, in addition to the special requirements of orthodontic practice.

The NEBDN awards a Certificate in Orthodontic Nursing and the syllabus includes:

- Anatomical structures relative to orthodontics.
- Classification of malocclusion.
- Orthodontic treatment.
- Orthodontic appliances.
- Cross infection control in orthodontics.
- Interdisciplinary care.
- Laboratory skills.
- Oral health in relation to the care and management of appliances.
- Orthodontic stock control.
- Medico legal requirements of orthodontic practice.
- Clinical governance in orthodontics including indices to record orthodontic treatment need and for the success of treatment.

Nurses who have the Certificate in Orthodontic Nursing will also have been trained to take photographs and trace lateral cephalogram radiographs. There is an additional opportunity to take a formal module in dental impression taking.

Formal post registration qualifications for dental nurses

There are currently seven formal post-registration qualifications offered by NEBDN and several are relevant to orthodontic practice:

- Orthodontic Nursing.
- Oral Health Education.
- Dental Radiography.
- Oral Implant Nursing.
- Conscious Sedation in Dentistry.
- Special Care Dental Nursing.
- Fluoride Application.

The syllabus for each was re-published in January 2016 together with detailed requirements and specifications for trainers. The requirements to be an accredited course provider are both precise and exacting and found within the NEBDN 'Accreditation Enquiry Pack' (www.nebdn.org).

Further post registration training – Extended duties

From time to time, practitioners and clinicians will become aware of opportunities for extending the experience and competence of staff.

Examples might be:

1. Record and calculate IOTN and PAR scores.
2. Clinical Photography.
3. Nurse-led oral hygiene clinic.
4. Record tooth alignment by digital intra-oral scanning.
5. Impression Taking.
6. Recording Plaque Indices.
7. Suture Removal.

There may be established courses already set up, for example, courses to teach how to record occlusal indices and calculate PAR scores.

Delta Dental are an extended course provider for dental nurses, working with British Association Dental Nurses (BADN) and Orthodontic National Group (ONG).

If a practitioner proposes to provide a bespoke course, the following steps are required:

1. Consult the GDC, to check that the training a practitioner would like to provide is permitted within the Scope of Practice allowed by the GDC.
2. Arrange training according to the education standards criteria set out by the GDC. These are:
 - Patient protection.
 - Quality evaluation and review.
 - Student assessment.
 - Equality and diversity.
3. Design any course with some accepted educational standards in mind, if any are available and recognised.

Standards quoted from the NEBDN document "Consultancy Visits to Training Providers" are:

1. Programme Content and Design.
2. Recruitment.
3. Teaching and Learning.
4. Assessment.
5. Student Support.
6. Resources.
7. Personnel Management.
8. Quality Assurance.

Finally, there is merit in arranging for any new and bespoke training course to be reviewed for content, organisation and assessment by a Postgraduate Dean, or by colleagues at a University dental hospital orthodontic department who might be able to provide an external and objective assessment of quality and may be able to underwrite any certification for staff who complete the training successfully.

References:

Overview of qualifications Dental Nurses may hold: www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/overview

GDC regulations of the Scope of Practice for Dental Professionals: www.gdc-uk.org

Orthodontic National Group for Dental Nurses and Therapists: www.orthodontic-ong.org/

The National Examining Board For Dental Nurses: www.nebdn.org

Updated and reviewed by the Clinical Governance Directorate of the British Orthodontic Society 2023. Recommendations may change in the light of new evidence.

Administrative Office: The Royal College of Surgeons of England 38-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields London WC2A 3PE
Telephone: 020 7353 8680 Fax: 020 7353 8682 Email: executivesec@bos.org.uk www.bos.org.uk BOS is a Company Limited by Guarantee.
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