

Practice Settings and Non-Traditional Jobs

Sorting Out the Terminology

Independent Practice: The independent practice of dental hygiene is often visualized as a freestanding dental hygiene practice but it is only one form of direct access to dental hygiene care. The goal is to increase the public's access to care, not to have dental hygienists working in isolation from dentists or other health providers. The freestanding dental hygiene practice may look very different from a traditional dental office, depending on the dental hygienist's area of focus.

Unsupervised/Autonomous Practice: Unsupervised practice means dental hygienists can make treatment decisions within their scope of practice without the supervision of a dentist. The status of supervision is defined within the provincial dental hygiene regulations.

Self-Regulation: Self-regulation means being accountable to the public for your actions.

Guide to 22 Alternative Practice Settings

Clinical Dental Hygiene - Employee

Great for: Those who prefer to have set hours and a constant working environment(s) and salary, prefer to concentrate on the technical and service sides of dental hygiene and have little interest in the administration and business aspects.

Jobs: Dental hygienist working in a solo or group practice for general dentists or specialists.

Upsides: Employment and salary stability that comes from being an employee versus self-employed. Employer contributions to CPP and EI. The employer may provide bonuses and financial contributions to professional development and continuing education. See "[Employment Statistics and Trends](#)" for statistics regarding employee benefits among CDHA members). The financial risk of the business lies with the employer, not the dental hygienist.

Possible Downsides: Limited freedom and flexibility of scheduling, hours, workplace, limited control over decision making. Fewer income tax deductions compared to self-employed dental hygienists. Lack of vertical movement in the job, repetitive work environment.

CDHA web page of interest: "[Self-Employed vs. Employee Status](#)" for the legal differences between being an employee and being self-employed.

Clinical Dental Hygiene - Self-Employed, Contract

Great for: Dental hygienists who want the freedom and flexibility to define their workplace - in terms of hours, clients, place of work, and methods used. Someone who is interested in running the business side of a dental hygiene practice and who will be able to deal with the stresses of being self-employed.

Jobs: Dental hygiene contractor, who has contract(s) with any number of dental practices to provide dental hygiene services.

Upsides: Freedom and flexibility of scheduling, hours, workplace, as well as the ability to make many more deductions from income tax than an employee dental hygienist, such as deductions for equipment purchases and travel expenses. Opportunity to make a greater margin of profit, provided such aspects as increased numbers of clients and fee collection efficiency are taken care of.

Possible Downsides: Lack of employee benefits such as payment for statutory holidays and vacation pay. Increased financial risk because of self-employment.

CDHA web page of interest: "[Self-Employed vs. Employee Status](#)" for the legal differences between being an employee and being self-employed.

Clinical Dental Hygiene - Self-Employed, Autonomous Practice

Great for: Those who prefer to be independent in their work, don't need the stability that comes from working in a dentist's practice. Must be able to live by the phrase "Business is business." Someone with excellent business and interpersonal skills, who desires a challenge.

Jobs: Freestanding dental hygiene clinics and mobile dental hygiene services.

Upsides: Able to set up a practice on one's own terms, determine the hours, billing, and clients. The workplace is owned by the dental hygienist. Even greater freedom and flexibility than self-employed dental hygienists in contract with a dentist(s).

Possible Downsides: Lack of employee benefits (payment for statutory holidays and vacation pay). Financial risk because of self-employment. There may be competing interests from other oral health providers. Also, there may be problems with current regulations (depending on the province) such as requirements of orders for treatment for scaling from Ontario and the 365-day rule in British Columbia.

CDHA web page of interest: "[Self-Employed vs. Employee Status](#)" for the legal differences between being an employee and being self-employed.

Article of interest: "[The Challenges of Setting up a Business](#)" by Margit Juhasz. Probe Vol. 36 No. 5; September/October 2002, page 195. **These practices are mainly found in British Columbia and Ontario.**

Public Health

Great for: Those who have a passion for the community and want to help those who are less advantaged. Previous experience in program planning and management would be helpful, as well as an understanding of the ethnic and demographic diversity of the community.

Jobs: Working in public health department or unit and school districts. Conducting oral health assessments, referrals and providing preventive services, and developing educational strategies to change health behaviours of clients. Fluoride mouth rinse programs, oral health presentations, health fairs, smoking awareness and prevention.

Upsides: Flexibility, variation of the job and personal growth.

Possible Downsides: Somewhat lower pay than those working in clinical practices.

Article of interest: "[Healthy Mouth ~ Healthy Body: A Mouth Care In-Service Pilot Project](#)" by Mickey Emmons Wener, Carol-Ann Yakiwchuk, and D.J. Brothwell. Probe Vol. 37 No. 1; January/February 2003, page 15

Long-Term Care

Great for: Those with excellent interpersonal skills. Good for someone who wants to define their own job, make their own hours, etc. Must be able to convince long-term care organizations that their clients need dental hygiene care.

Jobs: Mobile, self-employed position providing dental hygiene care - preventive, educational - in acute and extended care facilities; providing clinical and educational services for patients and residents, providing staff and caregiver/family training in oral hygiene and serving as advocates and change-agents to ensure that the health care needs of their diverse population are met. Can work part-time in extended care and the rest of the time in a "traditional" practice.

Upsides: Growing field because of Canada's aging population. Flexible work hours and personal gratification. Able to help the clients who most need help.

Possible Downsides: Morale and stress difficulties because dental hygienists must deal with dementia and non-compliant patients. Red-tape concerns vary according to the province, some limitations due to supervision requirements.

Article of interest: "[Alternative Practice in Long-Term Care Facilities](#)" by Marilynne Fine. Probe Vol. 36 No. 5; September/October 2002, page 190.

Hospital

Great for: Dental hygienists who thrive on busy atmospheres, who are energetic and enjoy meeting diverse and changing challenges.

Jobs: Dental hygienist within a hospital or clinic, dental manager of a hospital's oral health program and services.

Upsides: More opportunity for vertical promotion than in a clinic, varied tasks and challenges.

Possible Downsides: Stressful and hectic work atmosphere, encounters with red tape.

Article of interest: "[The Roller-Coaster Ride of My Life, or the Life of a Dental Hygienist/Dental Manager in a Pediatric Facility](#)" by Anne Clift. Probe Vol. 36 No. 4; July/August 2002, page 135.

National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces

Great for: Those who have an interest in working in the Canadian Forces, who enjoy variety and challenges in dental hygiene, who don't mind relocating when needed.

Jobs: Dental hygienist for the Canadian Forces (can be enlisted or not), both in a clinic and in the field.

Upsides: Training is paid for (if a member of the Canadian Forces) in exchange for obligatory service. There is a strong emphasis on continuing education. Standards are the same across the country. Clients all aged 18 to 55 and in good medical health. Cost is not an issue, and the dental hygienist's salary is calculated in relation to quality of care, not production. There are unique challenges and experiences that wouldn't be found in any other practice, as well as a greater variety of tasks related to practising dental hygiene in a field operation, and chance for advancement within the Forces.

Possible Downsides: Changing in postings and deployment can impede developing a relationship with the clients, as well as lapses in care and hygiene progress. Limited freedom and flexibility.

Website of interest: Department of National Defence, Career Opportunities in National Defence and the Canadian Forces - [Civilian Careers](#)

Education

Great for: Those who are dedicated to dental hygiene education. Those with patience and good interpersonal skills, and who are willing and able to continue their education (most kinds of teaching will require at least a bachelor's degree, if not more).

Jobs: Working for universities, community colleges, or private teaching facilities. Possibilities for research and publication.

Upsides: Vertical movement possibilities, the ability to work with and train future dental hygienists, a prominent role in the dental hygiene community.

Possible Downsides: Limited interaction with clients, fewer jobs than in clinical dental hygiene.

Website of interest: [Dental Hygiene Educators Canada](#)

Research

Great for: Those planning to continue their education; a BSc or MSc is generally required for research, if not a more advanced degree.

Jobs: Write grant proposals; develop research methodology; collect and analyze data; conduct clinical, biomedical, health systems or environmental research; conduct research surveys; write articles and scientific papers for professional publications. Perform reviews and evaluate products.

Upsides: This is an extremely important role in the advancement of dental hygiene, and a job in research will have many challenges and opportunities.

Possible Downsides: No set hours.

Website of interest: [University of Manitoba School of Dental Hygiene. Research Interests](#)

Document of interest: [CDHA Research Agenda](#)

Sales

Great for: Those with excellent interpersonal skills, who enjoy travelling and encountering challenges. Salespeople must also be self-motivated, disciplined, assertive, flexible, and organized.

Jobs: "Combination of educator, troubleshooter, and resource person." Trade-show industry; distribute goods and inform colleagues about a product.

Upsides: Building relationships through customer service. Lots of travelling. Money is made on a commission and bonus basis, and there are benefits including car/travel benefits. Opportunities for professional development, education, and learning experiences. Results can be seen immediately versus clinical dental hygiene, where results are long-term.

Possible Downsides: Salaries are generally low, although made up for in many cases by commission revenues. A thick skin is required as there may be many rejections of the products being sold. In the long-term, sales can be very stressful, and there are very long hours. A salesperson must be away from home very frequently and for long periods.

Article of interest: [From Clinic to Desk](#)" by Angela Best. Probe Vol. 36 No. 1; January/February 2002, page 29.

Publishing

Great for: Those with an aptitude and a desire to write as well as to research; those who want to continue their education past a diploma or undergraduate degree.

Jobs: Writing for national and international medical, dental, and dental hygiene journals, news magazines, trade journals, textbooks, consumer publications, children's books, newsletters, brochures, handouts for dental offices.

Upsides: Increased career prospects, ability to influence the oral health professions and the public.

Possible Downsides: No interaction with clients, a long way from the practical side of dental hygiene.

Website of interest: [Journal of Contemporary Dental Practice](#); also, search on sites like amazon.com under "dental hygiene" to see examples of the latest books on dental hygiene (especially under "kids").

Dental Insurance

Great for: Those interested in more of an "office job," who want opportunities for vertical movement.

Jobs: Working in the claims division, marketing division, or administration of an insurance broker.

Upsides: Excellent benefit packages, standard work hours. Possible Downsides: Must start at the bottom of the industry and work up; political atmosphere.

Website of interest: [Canada Life, Canadian Division, Dental](#)

Administration

Great for: Those interested in more of an "office job" and who want opportunities for vertical movement.

Jobs: Office manager, program coordinator, public health administration, administrators at dental hygiene schools.

Health promotion and disease prevention programs, managed care programs.

Upsides: Provides an opportunity for vertical movement.

Possible Downsides: Removed from the practical side of dental hygiene, although not necessarily from the clients.

Website of interest: Pennsylvania College of Technology; [Dental Hygiene - Health Policy and Administration Concentration](#)

Consulting

Great for: People who may want to go on to get an MBA and are interested in the business of dental hygiene.

Jobs: Training, facilitation, coaching, consulting, education.

Upsides: Ability to make a very good income, get experience in the business side of dental hygiene without becoming removed from the practical side.

Possible Downsides: A large emphasis on business.

Website of interest: [Advanced Hygiene Concepts Inc.](#)

Computer Software, Web Design

Great for: Dental hygienists with skill and interest in computers, web design, and software design.

Jobs: Creating websites for oral health professionals as well as for other businesses. Diagnostic software.

Upsides: Good salaries, challenging and interesting work.

Possible Downsides: No opportunity to use one's practical dental hygiene skills; no interaction with clients.

Website of interest: [Dentrix Practice Management Software](#)

Dental Laboratory Work

Great for: Those who want to continue their education (masters degree, etc.) and who are interested specifically in the scientific side of dental hygiene. **Jobs:** Product testing, fabrication of oral health products (restorations, implants, etc). **Upsides:** Still able to interact with clients in some cases, good salary, opportunities for vertical movement. **Possible Downsides:** Demanding work, can be repetitive (depending on the field). **Website of interest:** [Bio Dent Laboratories, Toronto](#)

Staff Placement Agency

Great for: Those with excellent organizational and interpersonal skills and contacts, or the ability to make contacts, in the dental hygiene and dental professions.

Jobs: Promotion and facilitation, working with both employers and employees to create correct fits.

Upsides: Local and international career opportunities; travelling and exploring.

Possible Downsides: No clinical work; no interaction with clients.

Website of interest: [Global Hygienists Community](#)

Law and Dental Hygiene

Great for: People interested in getting a law degree and practising law.

Jobs: Health law, personal injury, professional negligence, employment law. Teaching health law/jurisprudence courses to dental hygiene students.

Upsides: Good salary, helpful combination of practical knowledge and legal knowledge, job security.

Possible Downsides: One sees only the negative aspects of dental hygiene; little or no interaction with the many good aspects.

Website of interest: [Girones & Associates](#)

Government Regulation and Policy

Great for: People interested in politics and policy.

Jobs: Regulation monitoring and enforcement.

Upsides: Ability to work on dental hygiene issues at the macro level, where policies and regulations that affect dental hygiene are created. Provides challenges and potential for promotion.

Possible Downsides: No opportunity to maintain clinical skills.

Website of interest: [Health Policy and Communications Branch, Health Canada](#)

Consumer Advocacy

Great for: People dedicated to social movements, to the cause of consumers. People with good organizational and technical skills (such as knowledge to enable Internet networking).

Jobs: Helping consumers obtain access to care, developing networking systems to match existing resources with health care needs, advising consumers on insurance policies, commercial products and political issues affecting oral health care.

Upsides: Would be very rewarding for someone who is passionate about consumer advocacy. A private consulting business for oral health care consumers could address a relatively untapped niche. Enables the dental hygienist to maintain contact with the general population; provides the opportunity to help others.

Possible Downsides: Job security would be extremely hard to obtain; consulting and internship work would likely be the primary methods of employment with consumer advocacy groups, although an independent, private business could be set up for a certain group of people in a certain area. There are few real barriers, but at the same time there is little support or precedent. Finding a way of securing income from consumer advocacy work would be difficult.

Website of interest: [International groups concerned with toxins in dentistry](#)

Change Agents

Great for: Political-minded people, people who are dedicated to a cause within dental hygiene and want to influence business, government agencies, and public attitudes and behaviours. In many cases, further education and/or experience will be needed.

Jobs: Lobbying, law consulting, being an expert witness (in government committee hearings), health promotion.

Upsides: Provides a great challenge and experience for those interested in this area of dental hygiene; can give vertical movement. Can lead into a wide variety of other jobs.

Possible Downsides: Lobbying and consulting does not allow the dental hygienist to maintain clinical skills, and it

can be discouraging because government and business change is slow.

Website of interest: [The Health Action Lobby Group \(HEAL\)](#)

Volunteering

Great for: Someone who is dedicated to dental hygiene, who wants to get involved with their community or to travel around the world. Someone who is in the position to take anywhere from a few days to a couple of years to travel to and work in another country or another region.

Jobs: Educating and practising abroad, especially in developing countries; providing services to underprivileged areas and people in Canada.

Upsides: Great opportunities to travel and to help people (and especially children) in need. Provides great experiences in teamwork, meeting challenges, and providing oral care in a less-than-ideal setting.

Possible Downsides: Usually requires self-financing or the ability to obtain income through part-time work. The challenges can be great, and frustration can result from continued exposure to stressful situations and poor conditions.

Website of interest: [DentalJobs.net](#) (look under "Volunteer") See "[Working & Volunteering Abroad](#)"

Resources on Alternative Practice Settings

There are many resources where you can find information about alternative practice settings and non-traditional jobs for dental hygienists:

The CDHA's [Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene](#) has featured many articles explaining the details of and giving examples of such jobs and opportunities.

The article "[Alternative Practice](#)" by Melinda Ferguson, for example, contains a vital guide to non-traditional jobs.

The article "[The Roller-Coaster Ride of My Life, or the Life of a Dental Hygienist/Dental Manager in a Pediatric Facility](#)" by Anne Clift describes in a funny and engaging way the hectic but rewarding life of a dental hygienist working in a children's hospital.

The CDHA document [Dental Hygiene: Definition, Scope and Practice Standards](#) also has information on the different elements and practice environments of dental hygiene, as well as addressing the responsibilities and practice standards of dental hygienists.

The feature article of the July/August 2001 issue of *Probe* is titled "[Alternative Dental Hygiene Practice: Access, Cost, and Harm Considerations](#)" It was written by D.W. Lewis for the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, and it addresses "the accessibility, cost, and safety issues for patients when dental hygienists provide self-initiated dental hygiene care unsupervised by dentists" (139). The main focus of the article is on the availability and accessibility that unsupervised dental hygiene would bring:

"...it is envisaged that **most self-initiated dental hygiene care would be provided in a wide variety of alternative or non-traditional practice settings. These could include care provision to seniors and other special groups in long-term care facilities, institutions, and community centres.** Some fixed and mobile dental hygiene practices serving a broad range of patients have already been established by dental hygienists in Canada, although none of them is truly independent of some level of dentist supervision or direct contact

"They could, however, possibly provide less expensive preventative care, improve geographic accessibility by increasing the number and convenience of the sites where the care they render is available, and provide education to decrease the negative attitudes of some persons. But their main impact on the reduction of these barriers would result from their taking the full range of dental hygiene services - using mobile or on-site equipment - directly to persons who currently have difficulties and disabilities that prevent them from readily accessing traditional practices." (Pages 139-140, 141)

["Evolution, Not Revolution"](#) by Fran Richardson. *Probe* Vol. 36 No. 1; January/February 2002, page 24. Addresses self-regulation and the future of dental hygiene; advocates for an expanded and more independent role for the profession. "The future of dental hygiene in Canada does not lie in the traditional private practice with our dentist colleagues."

"The Political Economy of Dental Hygiene in Canada" by Pran Manga. Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, July 2002.

["From Clinic to Desk"](#) by Angela Best. *Probe* Vol. 36 No. 1; January/February 2002, page 29. Personal experience of a dental hygienist who moved into sales. Outlines the benefits and challenges of the job.

["Entrepreneurship"](#) by Pat Spencer. *Probe* Vol. 36 No.5; September/October 2002, page 181. Written by a dental hygienist who was drawn to dental hygiene for long-term care residents and set up her own practice. Includes important information about entrepreneurship and the qualities that are vital to an entrepreneur as well as information about the role of dental hygiene in community and long-term care.

["Alternative Practice in Long-Term Care Facilities"](#) by Marilynne Fine. *Probe* Vol. 36 No. 5; September/October 2002, page 190. A dental hygienist working in an independent operation for long-term care facilities describes her entrance into and the operation of an alternative practice.

["Healthy Mouth ~ Healthy Body: A Mouth Care In-Service Pilot Project"](#) by Mickey Emmons Wener, Carol-Ann Yakiwchuk, and D.J. Brothwell. *Probe* Vol. 37 No. 1; January/February 2003, page 15. The details and process of setting up a "Health Promotion Unit" to serve the community and specifically a long-term care centre.

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