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Title: **Dear Dentist, Can a Nurse Assist You?**

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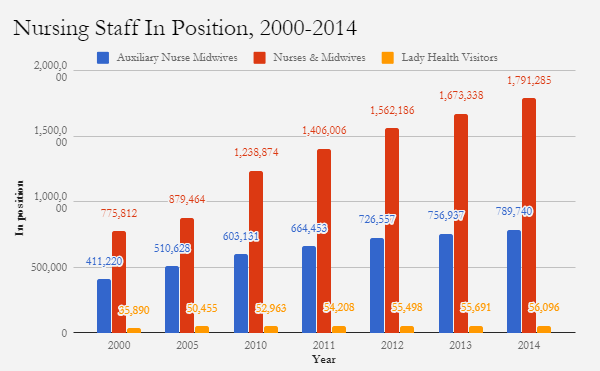
**Contributorship details:** Biju Soman (BS) has conceived the idea of selecting this topic for writing the manuscript. Aswathi Raj L (ARL) and Jasna T (JT) have done an extensive review of literature. BS has written the manuscript and ARL has edited the content. BS, ARL and JT have read the manuscript.

**Dear Dentist, Can a Nurse Assist You?**

According to the Indian Nursing Council (Snapshots, 2016), 789,740 ANMs and 56,096 LHVs are registered in the different state nursing councils of the Country. About 2.00 lakh ANMs (Auxiliary nurse midwives) and thousands of female health supervisors and public health nurses are working in the public health sector alone. They are responsible for implementing all national and state health programmes at ground level. Critical activities related to maternal and child health, disease control, immunization, epidemic management and health promotion are carried out by peripheral public health nursing personnel.

As of 2014, there were 1.79 million registered nurses/midwives and 786,796 auxiliary nurse midwives in India, according to INC data.

**Figure 1: Statistics of nursing personnel registered with the INC**



*Source: Indian Nursing Council*

**Oral health and public health**

In recent years, oral health has improved as more of us are looking after our teeth better. The skills of the dental team, coupled with advances in dentistry, mean that a visit to the dentist is seen as a positive way to support health and well-being. There are still high levels of oral diseases to address, as well as maintaining and improving oral and general health. It has been said that 'dental nursing should evolve in a way that promotes parity with nurses in general medicine.

Dental Nurses provide chairside support to dentists across the full range of treatment provision. They play a key role in the patient support aspects of the job and also have responsibility for infection control and health and safety in the workplace.

To be a dental nurse a nurse needs to have excellent communication skills, a caring nature and be highly organised. Dental Nurses need to be friendly and approachable, reliable, calm and be flexible enough to respond to unexpected situations as they arise.

In a dental practice Dental Nurse will provide direct support with the treatment itself.

**Roles and responsibilities**

1. taking responsibility for the decontamination of instruments
2. maintaining dental operating equipment
3. ensuring that all relevant materials and supplies are in place
4. looking after patient records – including making notes when the dentist is examining a patient
5. working closely with the dentist, responding quickly to requests and generally keeping the surgery ready for use

Dental Nurse will also be responsible for ensuring high standards of cleanliness and control of infection. With extra training you could take x-rays and clinical photographs, take impressions, make models of teeth and apply fluoride varnish to prevent tooth decay. Dental Nurse may also help with reception work. Tact and discretion are important qualities for a dental nurse - you will be handling confidential patient information and caring for people who may be anxious.

**Entry requirements**

Internationally, a Dental Nurse can usually work as a trainee dental nurse without academic qualifications but, to progress to being a qualified dental nurse, you will need to study for a course in dental nursing, either part or full time, that is approved by the General Dental Council. Exact course requirements will vary from provider to provider, but a minimum 2 GCSEs (C grade or above) in English language and maths or a science subject are usually required for part-time courses. Full-time degree level courses may require A-levels or equivalent level 3 qualifications.

Yet, after the establishment of INC and nursing education has grown up so widely in India, there is no awareness and initiation to start a certificate or add on course in Dental Nursing in India. More surprisingly, there is no coverage of dental nursing aspect, dentistry, or community dentistry in the nursing syllabus in India, from ANM to Doctorate level of curriculum.

**Working condition**

A Dental Nurse must be happy to work as part of a team and willing to learn and understand the science behind dentistry. He/ she will be dealing with a broad range of people, each with their own characteristics and concerns so he/ she need to be tactful and friendly and able to offer advice and educate others. He/ she will often need to follow instructions from the dentist.

**Working as part of a team**

As well as dentists, the dental team includes the following dental care professionals:

1. Dental hygienist
2. Dental nurse
3. Dental technician/technologist
4. Dental therapist

Whatever role the Dental Nurse choose, he/ she be making a big contribution to looking after the nation's teeth, gums and mouths.

Being a dental nurse requires team work, you will be the main support of the dentist and handle anything related to patient care ensuring everything is disinfected/sterilised. You must also prepare instruments beforehand with all the correct equipment set up so the dentist can work swiftly. Communication is also key for a role like this as generally practices expect dental nurses to help around the reception area this means taking appointments, answering any calls, processing payments and comforting patients.

**Skills needed**

Most dental diseases are preventable, so it is important that all members of the dental team are skilled and qualified. Some skills and qualities are needed by everyone working in the dental team:

1. Willingness to learn
2. Good manual dexterity
3. An eye for detail
4. Excellent people skills so you can deal with a broad range of people
5. Ability to offer advice and educate others
6. Team working

**Where the Dental Nurse will work**

The dental team may work in a variety of settings including general high street practices, hospitals, community services or in universities, and this gives you different options on how to further is career. He/ she could train to be a dentist and run a high street practice, work as a dental hygienist to help prevent dental disease or train as a dental nurse and help the team deliver treatment and advice. Alternatively, he/ she could train as a dental technician and make dentures, crowns, bridges and retainers for patients.

**Day-to-day tasks may include**

1. Passing instruments to the dentist or hygienist
2. Removing water and saliva from the patient's mouth during treatment
3. Preparing materials to make fillings
4. Making sure that the patient is relaxed and comfortable at all times
5. Keeping the surgery tidy and sterile
6. Sterilising instruments
7. Helping record information about each patient

The Dental Nurse may also help at the reception area, booking appointments, taking payments for treatment and greeting and reassuring patients. He/ she may work at a general dental practice, a hospital, with the community dental service or in a university. He/ she could also work in the armed forces.

**Career path and progression**

With experience, the Dental Nurse may be able to move into jobs like team manager, team leader or dental practice manager. With further training, he/ she could become a dental therapist, helping a dentist carry out the more routine dentistry work. He/ she could also become a dental hygienist, helping people to look after their teeth and gums. He/ she might decide to train as an orthodontic therapist helping dentists to improve the look and position of a patient's teeth. He/ she works with Dentists to assist them with all aspects of patient care, from carrying out check-ups to seeing patients through operations. He/ she can work in a general practice, within a hospital or even in the armed forces, but your typical responsibilities will include:

* Setting up and sterilising equipment in the surgery ready for each patient
* Ensuring the Dentist has everything they need to hand during the course of the appointment
* Reassuring patients
* Recording information about each case
* Using dental tools to remove saliva from each patient’s mouth so the Dentist’s job is unhindered

Dental nurses support the dentist in all aspects of patient care. This includes getting the appropriate instruments ready, mixing materials for dental procedures and ensuring patient comfort throughout their visit. The dental nurse will also take notes from dentists’ dictation for personal records and after the patient has been treated, will tidy the surgery and sterilise all of the dental instruments. In general dental practice, the dental nurse may help with reception work - making appointments, taking payments, dealing with paperwork and meeting and reassuring patients. Dental nurses can be employed in general practice, hospitals or the community dental services and can also train as a dental nurse in the armed forces.

In addition to evidence of academic ability, employers will expect a friendly, responsible attitude and a willingness to study and keep abreast with changes in the profession. Studies of nursing practice have demonstrated that better patient outcomes are achieved in hospitals and community staffed by a greater proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010). With the advancement in medicine and health care services it is needed to have Dental Nurses’ service also in many areas of Dentistry, such as clinics and community services especially in preventive dentistry, especially in a country like India where thousands of dental quacks are practicing on roadside, without any training or skills.

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