

Snapshot

Marg McNamara
Dental Assistant



What do I do?

I provide chairside assistance for dental operators, providing all their clinical needs and requirements. Basically I support them as they deliver treatment and care to patients—in our case to children as part of the Victorian School Dental Service.

What's an average day for me?

The first thing I do in the morning is see what patients are coming in and what their treatments will be, then I talk to the dental operator to see what their clinical requirements are. I set up the clinic for the day based on what the operator needs for each appointment, then assist the operator treat each patient. I am also involved in the everyday operational needs of the clinic—the sterilisation of equipment and the maintenance of stores.

What was my career path?

I've had nineteen years experience as a dental assistant after completing a traineeship in a private clinic. I've worked in both the private and public sectors, in hospitals and in clinics, in Victoria and overseas and now I work with children in the School Dental Program.

What do I like most about my role?

This is a very team-focused environment. Everyone's role is important, and everyone knows what his or her duties are within that role. I work with great people, and there is so much support available within the public system. If you need clinical advice you just have to pick up the phone and one of your colleagues can provide that support.

I call dentistry my passport to the world because I've been able to travel and have always been able to get employment.

What I really enjoy about public dentistry is that you're treating the person, and that's really rewarding. You have the opportunity to develop relationships with patients, and in the rural areas this job makes you a real part of the community. It's really lovely when I see the kids we've treated and they say: 'Look, it's the dental lady!'

What would I change?

I am sometimes disappointed by the parents of the children we treat—their demands and expectations of what treatments are required, and their expectations of their children, which might be far above what the poor child is capable of doing.

What skills do I need in my role?

To be a dental assistant you definitely need a sense of humour, and to be able to smile under stress. Communications skills, problem solving and lateral thinking are very important. You need to be flexible and adaptable, especially working with kids.

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