WHAT IS A DENTAL THERAPIST?

A dental therapist is a member of the oral health care team who works under the supervision of a licensed dentist. Dental therapists, often compared to a Nurse Practitioner or Physician Assistant, can provide most basic restorative procedures that dentists provide. More specifically, the dental therapist is educated to provide evaluative, preventive and restorative dental care within the scope of practice defined by Minnesota Statute. Dental therapists in Minnesota are also prepared to engage in community-based oral health disease prevention and promotional activities because of their training in motivational interviewing, their understanding of oral health and screenings as well as their ability to perform caries risk assessments and referrals.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THIS DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM?

In 2009, the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry became the first dental school in the nation to create an educational program for dental therapists. This new profession was created in response to the growing concerns regarding access to care and oral health care disparities in the state.

In 2015, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents approved a new Dual Degree program. Graduates will earn both a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene and a Master in Dental Therapy degree. The new program will commence in fall semester of 2016. Graduates of this program will be eligible to practice as dental hygienists and dental therapists.

IS THERE A NEED FOR DUAL LICENSED DENTAL HYGIENIST/ THERAPIST?

More and more, a dual licensed dental hygienist/therapist is becoming in demand, especially in dental clinics that are interested in incorporating dental therapy into their practice and are located outside the 7-county metropolitan area. A dual-licensed dental provider will provide dental practices flexibility in meeting the preventive and restorative needs of patients.

Dental therapists are required by law to work in settings that serve low income and underserved populations or in a dental health professional shortage area. Currently, 57 out of 87 Minnesota counties are designated in whole or in part as dental health professional shortage areas. Thus far, dental therapists have found employment in a variety of health care settings across Minnesota, including private practice, non-profit and large group clinics, federally qualified health care centers, educational institutions and hospitals.

HOW WILL DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM STUDENTS LEARN IN A TEAM-BASED SETTING?

Dual degree dental hygiene/therapy students will learn alongside dental and dental hygiene students in a team environment. This collegial approach to education ensures a solid educational and clinical preparation. Additionally, the team-based clinical model in the School of Dentistry strives to improve the efficiency of how oral health services are delivered by maximizing the knowledge and skill-set of each provider. The School of Dentistry team-based care model is guided by the need to improve the patient experience, improve the oral health of populations and lower the costs of care. Eight students will be enrolled in the program each year.
WHERE WILL DUAL LICENSED GRADUATES PRACTICE?

The dual licensed dental hygienist-dental therapist will practice in settings that either serve underserved patients or are in designated Dental Health Professional Shortage Area. This includes clinics in which 50% of patients seen by the dental therapist are enrolled in a MN Health Care Program, have a medical disability and/or chronic condition that prohibit access to care, or have no health coverage, and have a gross family income under 200% of the federal poverty level.

WHAT DO I NEED TO APPLY TO THE PROGRAM?

Students are eligible to apply for the Dual degree program after completing one year of college prerequisite courses. Therefore, the curriculum plan begins in year two.

Admission Requirements:
- Transcripts of all college courses
- Completion of 10 prerequisite courses (listed below)
- TOEFL score if non-native speaker of English (minimum 101)
- Personal Interview
- History of volunteering/community service

Prerequisite Courses:
- General Chemistry with lab
- General Biology with lab
- English Composition
- General Psychology
- Microbiology with lab
- Introduction to Statistics
- Human Anatomy
- Physiology (Basic Human Physiology for the Health Professions)
- Speech
- Sociology
- Biochemistry

Program Requirements:

Students enrolled in the dual degree program will simultaneously take courses required for both degrees. However, the Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene degree will be awarded after the completion of 122 bachelor’s level credits, which includes 78 dental specific credits and 44 liberal education/prerequisite credits. The Master of Dental Therapy degree will be awarded after the completion of 44 dental specific credits. A total of 166 course credits are needed to complete the dual degree program in four years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
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“I see greater efficiency in the clinic. Having a dental therapist on the team allows me to concentrate on the more complex cases and to work at the top of my license.” Dr. Kevin Nakagaki, Health Partners