



## In search of professional happiness



CNN Money magazine and Salary.com recently published their “Best Jobs in America” list (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bestjobs>).

According to the site, they assembled a list of positions that the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects will grow at an above-average rate over 10 years and that require at least a bachelor’s degree. Using their compensation data, jobs with average pay below \$50,000; total employment of less than 15,000; dangerous work environments; or fewer than 800 annual job openings, including both new and replacement positions, were eliminated. Next, they rated positions by stress levels, flexibility in hours and working environment, creativity, and how easy it is to enter and advance in the field. Last, jobs were ranked, giving double weight to compensation and percentage growth.

The good news: “Dentist” is ranked among the top 50. But it is only in 43rd place, and the rankings and grading caused me to rethink some of the statements made in the article. While it is meaningless to try to compare dentistry to some positions that ranked higher on the list, such as public relations specialist or actuary, it is interesting to compare how dentistry was rated in comparison to other health-care-related professions.

I found it surprising that the highest-ranked healthcare-related position was physician assistant (ranked 5). The article devoted more details to positions ranked in the top 10; thus, we get a better insight into the perspective they have of this position. Under “Why it’s great,” the answer for physician assistant was: “For most doctors, the worst part of their job is filling out paperwork and battling insurers. Physician’s assistants get to skip all that. Under a doctor’s supervision, they provide routine health care—conducting physical exams, ordering lab tests, prescribing medications, treating illnesses.” I always thought that the real fun starts at diagnosis, not at data collection.

Dentist was rated B for stress while veterinarian (ranked 49) was rated C for stress. Veterinary medicine more stressful than dentistry? If you are to treat

the never reported before, never to be seen again speckled polar donkey, then maybe. Otherwise, attending to the well-being of the family pooch is probably less stressful.

Dentist was rated C for creativity and pharmacist (ranked 9) was rated B for creativity. Unless mixing hallucinogenic potions with ingredients that exceed the boundaries of your license can be considered as creativity, I am not sure about this statement as well.

Dentist was rated C for flexibility and D for difficulty, and I have to agree with these ratings. It does require many years of education, and although most dentists own their own business, they have to physically be there and produce to keep it afloat. It is no wonder that we work long hours and do not take long vacations.

Let’s be realistic; dentistry may not be the top-ranked profession in the world, but it is definitely higher than 43rd. To a potential candidate to a dental school, I would say that the numbers speak for themselves. The high average earning in dentistry and the future demand for the profession seem very promising. On the other stuff—challenge, stimulation, satisfaction, gratification, and sense of accomplishment—you will have to trust us.

I guess to provide its readers with some peace of mind or to make them feel good about what they do, the piece also includes a short list of “big jobs that pay badly.” The list includes academic research scientists, chefs, and architects.

Although I am happy with what I do, given the opportunity would I switch? If you absolutely guarantee that I will be the first and only to report and treat the polar donkey, maybe. However, I will probably pass on the opportunity to be the researcher studying the donkey’s cellular matrix, the chef preparing its favorite salad, or the architect designing its future dream home.

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