



## The role of general dentists in dentistry today



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Not long ago, most dental offices were general practice clinics providing the entire range of dental services. With the development of the profession, specialty clinics focusing on oral surgery, periodontology, pediatric dentistry, endodontics, orthodontics, and other disciplines, relying mainly on referrals from general dentistry clinics, have become more common.

This model benefits patients and works well as long as the referral system is efficient, there is an effective route of communication between the various providers, and the patients do not need to wait too long between appointments. It is still the primary dentist's responsibility to approach the specialty clinics, to be familiar with all the procedures, and to lead the treatment. Many dental schools currently use this approach for teaching, either in interdisciplinary clinics or when the students and residents are rotating through the various departments.

Currently in the United States there are roughly 60 dentists per 100,000 people; this number is relatively low but could serve the population well. However, many dentists practice in the vicinity of big cities or in densely populated areas. This may lead to a shortage of dentists in more rural areas, and unsurprisingly the

shortage in specialists is even greater. Therefore, the model of specialty and general dentistry clinics that work together to provide the best quality of care cannot be considered in these areas. Instead, the traditional model of a general dentist who provides comprehensive oral healthcare may better suit rural areas. Some federal and state programs try to overcome the shortage of dentists in certain areas by providing various incentives, which usually address the need for general practitioners but not for specialists.

In spite of growing collaboration between general practitioners and specialists, the training, education, and development of general dentists should prepare her or him to be able to provide all the possible dental procedures. This is important when the dentist leads a treatment provided with the support of specialists, and even more important if the general dentist is the only oral healthcare provider in the area. The need for highly educated and trained general practitioners is only increasing with the development of the profession.

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