

What Makes A Dentist, Good Dentist: Expectations of Peers, Profession and Patients



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The practicing dentist-to-population ratios (DPR) vary widely among countries. In USA, there are around 42 to 108 dentists per 100,000 people, making a DPR of around 1:500 to 1:1000. As per WHO, the DPR in most of the western countries is 1:2000. In 2004, Pakistan had around just 5000 registered dentists that translated into a DPR of 1:30,000. These numbers have improved substantially in last 15 years. As per 2018 estimates¹, the total number of dentists has exceeded over 21,000 but the present DPR is still around 1:10,000. This reveals that despite of a vast increase in the number of dental graduates in last two decades, the DPR is still far below the accepted value.

However, the biggest challenge in Pakistan with respect to dentists is the inequitable distribution. In metropolitan cities of Karachi and Lahore, there is a high concentration of dentists (including dental specialists) making a DPR of 1:5000, whereas in rural districts of interior Sind there are hardly any registered dentist available for population of several tens thousands.

Dentistry has gained people's attention and now more and more students are opting dentistry as their career. People choose to become dentists because they can do following²:

1. Improve the lives of their patients: Dentist can experience the professional satisfaction of positively influencing their patients' lives life by restoring oral health.
2. Independent in their careers: Dentists have the opportunity to own their own businesses right after dental college. This gives them a lot of independence and allows them to set their own business and career goals.
3. Earn a good take home salary: It's true that incomes vary across the countries and largely depend on the type of practice and pool of patients but it's a general observation that dentists belong to high revenue generastratum.
4. Flexibility with respect to career options: Over 80% of dental graduates become private practitioners but there is always a room for graduates to make career in basic & clinical research and in academia.
5. A flexible lifestyle: A dentist can choose what kind of lifestyle he/she will lead and often what hours and days they will work.

6. A respected members of community Dentists being physicians & surgeons of the oral cavity, are highly regarded by the communities they serve.

7. Exercise creativity in their work. Dentistry is not a true science but a blend of art & science. The mastery of discipline comes with developing ones craftsmanship in procedures to deliver predictable and esthetic results. The net result of that creativity is a satisfied patient who can happily show his smile to others.

8. Team player: Although dentists are mostly considered as solo practitioners but in fact dentistry is a team-oriented profession where dental hygienist, assistant and lab technician work together to offer durable and esthetic outcomes to the patients.

But what make dentists professionally successful is a different set of parameters.³ The seasoned practitioners would suggest following traits that are inherent in successful dentists:

1. Good manual dexterity: It's an essential requirement. Oral cavity is a relatively small space to work. Procedures may require good eye-hand coordination. Having suitable motor skills and being able to operate instruments accurately in a limited space is the key.
2. Strong communication skills: A large proportion of people do not like visiting a dentist. A good dentist is friendly and is someone who can put people at ease. It's essential that dentists can educate patients regarding diagnosis and treatment plan. Being able to explain technical information in an understandable way is a plus. Moreover, dentists have to work closely with auxiliaries, so they too should have a pleasant interaction.
3. Business intelligence: A good business sense is an important trait for dentists. Many dentists own their practice or are part of a group practice. There is a lot that is needed to market the practice, keep track of expenses and handle all the legal requirements, etc.
4. Life-long learner: Dentistry is evolving on an immense pace. Technology has made new learning accessible to those who wish to update themselves. A good dentist should stay up to date on the latest advances.
5. Compassionate and honest: A good dentist is honest and compassionate. Dental problems can affect many areas of a person's life, and dentists need to be sensitive to the

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problems caused by poor dental health. Having a compassionate attitude will help patients feel at ease and more comfortable seeking help. In addition, dentists must also be honest. Without honesty, it is almost impossible for patients to trust your judgment and put their care in your judgment and put their care in your hands.

6. Problem solver: Problem solving skills are an essential quality for a dentist. A large percentage of patients require customized treatment plan for which dentist needs to devise best management approach within the financial constraint of patient's affordability.

The profession and peers certainly have a weight in their definition of what constitutes a good dentists. However, the final call is of patients. It is the patient who labels a dentist, as a good one or just an average one. Patients generally expect following qualities in their dentist⁴:

1. Comfortable with close personal interaction.
2. Easy to talk to.
3. Trustworthy.
4. Attention to details/ finesse in craftsmanship.
5. Artistic/ good esthetic appraisal.
6. A leader in profession.
7. Excited about his/her profession.
8. Caring and concerned about patient experiences.

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