



oral health

The Window to your Body's Health

Oral Health affects everyone everyday – and normally most people don't think about it. Good oral health allows you to speak, smile, kiss, smell, taste and chew with self-assurance.

The University of Otago's Bachelor of Oral Health is an exciting three-year degree programme at New Zealand's only School of Dentistry, delivering excellent and innovative education in oral health.

"It's great knowing that at the end of this course I'll have the qualification for two careers. It's really rewarding working in the clinical environment and knowing that you can help someone achieve and maintain good oral health."

Amanda Buxcey
2nd Year Bachelor of Oral Health Student

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LAUREN APPEYARD

Bachelor of Oral Health

A desire to work with and help people led Lauren Appeyard to the Bachelor of Oral Health. Lauren headed to university for a couple of years after leaving school, but didn't really enjoy the experience. So she decided to turn her summer job as a dental assistant into a full-time job, and she has never looked back.

"I just loved working in the dental environment," Lauren explains "and I wanted to be able to do more for patients and people." So Lauren applied for and gained entry into the three-year Bachelor of Oral Health.

Now that Lauren is here studying what she enjoys, she couldn't be happier with her choice. She loves the fact that "everyone in the programme is really focused."

Lauren is in her second year of study and of course enjoys the practical aspect of the programme, working in the Dental School Clinics. She is excited about having her own patients and being able to "apply all the theory and practical skills she has learnt in the programme to real patients."

For Lauren dental therapy and hygiene is a people career which gives "job satisfaction, seeing patients' behaviours change for the better."

Dental hygiene "is not just about white, shiny teeth, but is about showing people that good oral health is important." Dental therapy "is about getting children used to the dental environment and addressing problems before they become extensive."

According to Lauren, "both are awesome things to do as they encourage people to have a positive attitude towards the dental environment."

**Who is an oral health professional?**

An oral health professional forms an important part of the oral health team. Oral health professionals have skills in dental hygiene, dental therapy and oral health promotion.

Dental hygienists educate patients about the health of their mouths and provide options for improving and maintaining oral health. Dental hygienists work closely with dentists in detecting and treating oral disease and in preparing mouths for complex restorative care.

A dental therapist is a highly-skilled professional member of the oral health team who provides quality dental care to various sections of the community, particularly preschoolers and children. Early detection of dental disease and preventive treatment is a key aspect of the work of a dental therapist.

An oral health professional can be registered to practise as a dental hygienist or as a dental therapist or both. Both disciplines are skilled at promoting healthy lifestyles and have a strong awareness of the socio-cultural influences on health.

Why study oral health?

Good oral health is the key to living life comfortably and therefore impacts on people's daily lives. As an oral health professional you become part of the dental team, developing the skills to provide dental and periodontal care and to foster life-long positive oral health attitudes and behaviour in patients. You will also obtain skills in health promotion. The qualification that you graduate with will provide work opportunities in New Zealand and overseas.

Background required

In order to study oral health you need to have attained a satisfactory standard in NCEA Level 2 Biology and English or approved equivalents. You will also need to like and care for people, as well as be reasonably fit and healthy.

Careers in Oral Health

Graduates will meet the requirements for registration as either a dental hygienist or a dental therapist, or both. Graduates will be able to apply knowledge about health and disease to health promotion in education, community development and public policy.

There is a wide range of employment opportunities, which include working in private practices, orthodontic practices, school-based clinics, iwi-based clinics and hospital dental clinics.

There is a demand for oral health graduates in New Zealand and Australia, and other countries world-wide.

What will I study?

The University of Otago's Bachelor of Oral Health is an exciting three-year degree at New Zealand's only School of Dentistry. The programme delivers excellent and innovative education in oral health.

Oral Health degree students work in a team with undergraduate and postgraduate dental and dental technology students, and this is made possible because the programme is delivered from within the School of Dentistry. From the beginning of their study oral health students work as part of an oral health team. They also have constant access to highly qualified specialist staff. Graduates will be leaders in the field, because the programme ensures its teaching and research are continually refined and improved to keep in step with oral health best-practice. The programme also focuses on enabling the students to be well prepared for life-long, self-directed learning.

In the first year of the Oral Health degree students learn how the body works, particularly how oral tissues interact with their environment. Students will learn the most effective use of computers in the study and practice of oral health and will complete a paper in Māori Society. Clinical practice begins in the first year as well. Initially students develop clinical skills on models and "phantom heads" and will later treat patients under supervision.

The second year introduces pathology, pharmacology and medicine relevant to oral health. Students will also study a paper in Sociology and in Health Promotion. A large part of the year is spent developing clinical skills in dental hygiene and dental therapy.

The third and final year concentrates on further clinical training, community oral health and oral health promotion. Students also undertake a research project.

Admission to the programme

Admission to Oral Health is restricted, and the number of candidates admitted to the first year of the programme is determined by the number of places available for clinical teaching. All applicants must have fulfilled the University of Otago entrance requirements.

Selection into Oral Health is based on gaining a satisfactory level in NCEA Level 2 Biology and NCEA Level 2 English or NZQA recognised equivalent, OR having undertaken previous university study at a standard determined by the Faculty of Dentistry, OR be over 20 years of age and have experience in a health-related field and have passed the equivalent of NCEA Level 2 Biology within the last five years.

How do I apply for admission to Oral Health?

Application information for admission into the Bachelor of Oral Health is available online, at www.otago.ac.nz/healthsciences

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