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## Dental Assistant Program

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## **Dental Assistant**

The Dental Assistant Program was first offered in the West Des Moines Center Two in August 1967 — one of the first program offerings of the college. This one-year (4 quarters) program awarded a diploma upon completion. The program moved to the new health occupations building on the Ankeny Campus in 1971. Initially the program admitted one class of 22 students each fall. In 1969 a second class was admitted mid-year until 1980 when the spring entry class was eliminated. In the fall of 2007 the program admissions were changed to 44 students.

Sharon Moore Eckstrom, CDA, was the first program chair and Judy Sheets, CDA, was the first faculty member. Virginia Wedemeyer, CDA and Alberta Lee CDA joined the faculty when the program added the mid-year class in 1969.

The program development and expansion benefited from a strong and involved advisory committee composed of dentists, dental assistants and dental hygienists. Eugene Young, DDS, was the first chair of the advisory committee and also taught some classes in the program for several years. He was a strong advocate for the program among dentists and the community. Each advisory committee has been active in making suggestions on the curriculum and supporting student placements. In recent years two students are appointed to the committee each year.

The program objective was to prepare competent, well-trained graduates to work hand-in-hand under the direction of the dentist in assisting with patient treatment, recording patient health histories, assisting with procedures, and taking and developing x-rays.

The curriculum included didactic classes in Dental Assistant and core classes (i.e. English, communications, psychology, and sociology). With the opening of a dental lab, the second term students treated local patients and were supervised by the instructional staff and dentists who served as clinicians. The students then completed clinical internships at dental offices.

The Program received accreditation from the American Association of Dental Assistants and the American Dental Association in the early '70s. A team from the national offices of these organizations did an initial site visit to review the program and prepare a report, which recommended the program certification. Accreditation gave the program additional status and assisted graduates in securing employment. The program has been reaccredited every seven years since. The program faculty also provided continuing education workshops that allowed certified dental assistants to keep their certification current.

In the early years of the program the need for continuing education for all dental professionals in the work force (dentists, dental hygienists and dental assistants) was addressed by the program advisory committee. The staff and advisory committees of the dental programs received a federal grant to assist those practicing in the field to keep current on materials, procedures, and regulations. Carol Coates, RDH, was employed as a consultant to implement the grant and worked closely with the DMACC dental staff to develop the necessary continuing education modules to meet the needs of the greater regional area and to some extent the whole state. Jane Jinkinson, RDH; Leone Young, RDH and Diane Schroder, CDA program faculty members and several dentists who were members of the program advisory

committee developed and served as continuing education instructors. The instructional modules were developed jointly by the instructors, dental assistants and dentists. They also conducted seminars and contracted with speakers who were experts in the different dental specialties fields to do presentations. The continuing education units were approved by the ADA, ADHA and ADAA for credits toward renewal of license/certification.

The dental assistant program continues to have high student appeal and excellent placement. Faculty members receive calls from dentists regularly when they have a vacancy. Graduates are employed in most dental offices and clinics throughout Central Iowa.

*Created August 2015 in celebration of DMACC's 50th Anniversary.*