

Good morning. My name is Emily Willett and I am an orthodontic resident at the College of Dentistry in Lincoln and a general dentist at Summit Dental Health in Omaha. I am a recent graduate from the Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) program at the UNMC College of Dentistry, and I would like to share some information about the academic and licensure process for providing dental care in the state of Nebraska.

I will describe the didactic and clinical training I received at the University of Nebraska, which is applicable statewide as approximately 85% of dentists in rural Nebraska are graduates of UNMC.

Almost all dental school graduates have earned a minimum of a four-year bachelors' degree prior to acceptance into a dental school, which is accredited by a national body, the Commission on Dental Accreditation, under the jurisdiction of the American Dental Association,. After completion of prerequisite science courses, an admission test, and an application and interview process, dental students are welcomed into a four-year doctoral program.

The dental school curriculum is front-loaded with instructive lecture/test-style coursework, as the foundation is important to understand the development and growth of the craniofacial structures, in addition to the development, progression, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral diseases and conditions. In other words, the wide spread concept that a dentist is merely one who "fixes teeth" is descriptive of only one area of a dentist's responsibility. The dentist is, in fact, a person dedicated to the highest standards of health through the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of all oral diseases and conditions.

Our dental school education is a four-year, full-time job, plus additional hours required for review of material and studying. In all four years of dental school, we have either didactic or clinical coursework from 8-5 Monday-Friday, 10+ months of the year. And equally as many hours required to review and learn the material outside of the framework of formal instruction. The curriculum is designed to develop the academic foundation and practice the hand skills to safely and effectively operate our dental equipment and perform dental procedures.

Each semester marks an increase in dental hand-skills coursework like restorative dentistry, periodontology, and oral surgery, layered with equally as important courses like medical emergencies, dental anesthesia, pathology, diagnosis and treatment planning, pharmacology, and oral medicine, to name a few. When people ask me what the academic rigor of dental school can be compared to, I say it is like finals week of your most difficult semester of college, every week. For example, April is a pretty notorious month at UNMC for first year dental students as one 17-day span manages to consist of a combination of 20 quizzes, lab practicals, and exams; each one as important as the last.

The didactic component is only one side of the education story to make us safe and effective dental practitioners. Beginning in the spring semester of our second year of

dental school, we care for patients under the supervision of our clinical faculty. Similarly, each semester also marks an increase in the number of clinical hours and the number of clinical procedures required for the successful progression through the dental curriculum. By the final semester, we are in clinic performing routine dental care approximately 26 hours a week. Our clinical experiences are shared across the spectrums of age and race, and we receive special education and course work for pediatric and geriatric populations, because their diagnosis and treatment is unique.

In addition to the formal clinical training received at the College of Dentistry, dental students serve as visiting practitioners as part of a 6-week clinical rotation in public health and private practice settings.

Finally, the licensure process is governed by the State Board of Dentistry and requires the successful completion of two written, two manikin-based clinical exams, and two patient-based clinical exams. The didactic coursework is effectively tested in a two-part national board exam and clinical decision-making and hand-skills are evaluated in the treatment-rendering exams. Successful completion of all written and skills assessments provided by an outside body in addition to graduation from an accredited dental school are required to obtain a dental license in Nebraska. For licensure maintenance, 30 hours of continuing education are required semiannually.

My hope is to convey to you that the level of education the dentists in Nebraska have received, make them uniquely qualified, capable, and confident providers. There is no such thing as an easy dental procedure, as there are serious anatomic, physiologic, etiologic, and pharmacologic factors that a four-year dental degree is essential to evaluate and treat.

Thank you.