

UPDATED DENTAL ASSISTING PODCAST

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Pamela Holden: We strive to make sure that when they leave here that they are prepared for working chair side in a dental office.

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: The main difference that I've noticed in their dental assisting program, compared to the other ones that I've experienced, is that they teach their students and they give them more of a hands on, real world experience.

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Michelle Peets: It really becomes very family oriented with your patients and with your team members that you work with. And so it's a very special experience.

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Narrator: 98 Seven Chatt Tech. Where 98.7% of our students earn a career. On today's episode, we'll explore the dental assisting program with those who are involved in it. We'll talk with the faculty, students, and an employer who will get you to the root of the program. Now let's meet our guests.

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Michelle Peets: My name is Michelle Peets. I am Program Director of Dental Assisting at Chattahoochee Technical College.

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Narrator: Michelle, as we start here, can you tell us about your job as the program director?

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Michelle Peets: So I actually started the program for Chattahoochee Technical College. It is a dental assisting program. So what I teach students to do in my yearlong program, it is three semesters, is all about dental anatomy, oral health care, and how to assist a dentist in repairing a tooth that might be

damaged. Or if you have no cavities and a wonderful, healthy, clean mouth. How to maintain that throughout your lifetime.

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Narrator: And isn't dental assisting really important for people's health?

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Michelle Peets: You're very correct. We find that there are over 100 diseases that have an oral manifestation, so the dentist might actually be the first person to identify a systemic disease with a patient. It does affect your heart. The same bacteria that causes build up on your teeth is the same bacteria that causes buildup on your arteries. And so we talk to students about all of that, how to talk to patients about that, how to recognize that there might be something going on and bring it to the dentist's attention or answer a question a patient might have about something translating from dental speak to layman's terms, and then how to assist the dentist in restoring a mouth to a healthy, happy, functioning mouth.

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Narrator: What exactly do the instructors teach?

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Michelle Peets: So we cover everything. We start with head and neck anatomy, so that you learn all of the vital parts of the face and oral cavity. We do microbiology and infection control, so you know how to stay safe in the work environment and keep your patients and coworkers safe. We do oral pathology, so we talk about diseases. You can identify in the mouth and medications that might be used to treat it all the way through every procedure done in dentistry. So it is a very comprehensive program along with hands on skills. You actually go out and work in a dental office as a dental assistant to sort of take that classroom knowledge and speed it up into real world time.

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Pamela Holden: Hi, my name is Pamela Holden and I'm an adjunct dental assisting instructor at Chattahoochee Technical College. I'm basically the lab instructor, so I teach all the lab skills to the students.

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Narrator: And you run the lab? What does that mean?

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Pamela Holden: The lab is set up just like a dental clinic. Dental chairs, patient chairs, dental assistant chairs, and then the operator chairs for the doctors. We have all the equipment that you would use in a dental office. And basically my job is to show the students and teach them how to work efficiently and work as a dental assistant chair side.

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Narrator: Are the students working on mannequins or on real people.

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Pamela Holden: Yes, we have what we call Type-A dots, and they're attached to our chair, so it's like a mouth with the rubber face attached to it so that they learn how to work inside of a mouth. But at some point in the program, they do transition and start working on each other as patients so that they know what it feels like to actually be in a human being's mouth.

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: Hi, my name is Doctor Reza Alemzadeh. I'm a general dentist and I practice in Canton, Georgia. I've been practicing dentistry for 20 years.

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Narrator: So what's your relationship with Chatt Tech?

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: I'm a member of the Professional Advisory Board for the Dental Assistant program, and I've been involved with them for over three years. We pretty much kind of oversee the curriculum and give advice. As far as, you know, courses and training that's been presented to the dental assistants and help support the program director.

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Narrator: We'll talk about money in a few minutes. But first, I hear dental assistants are in high demand right now.

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: Yes, absolutely. There's, um, there's definitely a shortage of dental assistant. And, um, as more dental practices open up in Georgia, there's going to be even more needs for good dental assistants.

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Narrator: Is there a difference between this program and other schools programs that you've noticed?

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: Absolutely. Um, over the past 20 years, I've had the pleasure of working with plenty of dental assistants, some of them from the other programs and most recently, um, a few from Chatt Tech. And the Chatt Tech program is very thorough. Very hands on. And it's actually the best dental assisting program I've ever experienced over the past 20 years.

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Narrator: It sounds like Chatt Tech is giving the students at least a six month head start.

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: Yes, absolutely. Because they already know how to work with equipment and how to do chair side. So their training is not just didactic. They do a lot of hands on clinical training, a lot more than the other programs. So when they get to offices like mine, they're already, like you said, six months ahead. They're already prepared. They already know the basics. And we just got to teach them a few things. And after that they're good to go.

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Narrator: Do you hire Chatt Tech students and do you recommend them to your colleagues?

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: Absolutely. I mean, um, I've been involved with the program for the past three years, and over the past three years we pretty much hired all of the experience and interns that we've gotten from the program. So absolutely, I highly recommend hiring the assistants that come out of that program.

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Narrator: We've heard from the administration. Now let's hear from a student.

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Tyrese Smith: I'm Tyrese Smith, I do dental assistant program at Chattahoochee Tech College.

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Narrator: What was the reason you enrolled in the dental assisting program?

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Tyrese Smith: Well, I used to have braces, and when I had braces. You gotta go get checkups frequently. So every time I go see the dental assistants working on me she would just always say how fun it was and how she got through school easily and it got me interested, so I went to Chatt Tech for it.

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Narrator: What did you have to do before you enrolled in the program?

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Tyrese Smith: I was doing dental assisting at Chatt Tech, but before you got to do your, um, your pre classes, like your math classes and things like that. So I was always at Chatt Tech after high school, but I just started taking the program this year.

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Narrator: How was your experience been so far?

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Tyrese Smith: I love my instructors. They're very funny. My classmates are also pretty cool too. We do a lot of hands on stuff as well, so it never gets boring.

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Narrator: Is this program a good match for your personality?

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Tyrese Smith: Yeah, I like to talk to people like I'm very communicative, like outside of outside of school. I just like having conversations. So it's not too big of a change for me to talk to somebody.

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Narrator: Tyrese, as a student, what's unique about the dental assisting program?

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Tyrese Smith: Yeah, we I said earlier about the hands on stuff. We do like actual like composites and restorations. We have like fake teeth we work on. So we were actually doing the stuff that actual dentists do at the office. So it's it's a lot a lot of fun.

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Narrator: And what about finding a job? Are you getting help from Chatt Tech?

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Tyrese Smith: Um, actually, next semester they're helping us do, um, externships. And we're going to be doing that the entire semester from January to May. Then after that, we're going to do another externship during the summer. So two separate opportunities to find the job.

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Narrator: Is there anything you'd like to tell a potential student?

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Tyrese Smith: It's a full time like program. You gotta devote a lot of time to studying and memorizing, but it's also pretty fun too. So if dental assisting was something you want to do, you should. You should do it. Just be prepared for the work you got to put into it.

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Narrator: Back to you, Michelle. Let's talk about the classwork. How much is bookwork and how much is hands on.

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Michelle Peets: So my students do online classes twice a week. So there are lectures and different things they can do from home. Because I do know that adult learning is different than high school. I know people have jobs or other responsibilities, family obligations, and so even other classes they're taking. So I've structured it where you can learn from home two days a week on your own time and then come to lab, and we're in lab all day long, two days a week. So we try and take what we've learned in lecture or from the reading or whatever activity is planned for that week, and then put it into real time practice in the clinic when the students are there.

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Narrator: For someone who may have a family or a limited time, how is this program user friendly?

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Michelle Peets: Covid did us the favor where we had to push everything online for social distancing, and we just found that students really kind of needed or wanted that experience. Um, some of my students still have some classes they need to take for the college, and so it really does give them the flexibility to be adults and to be able to maintain a certain balance in life. But it's just so important that the students understand when it's time to be in class, it's time to be in class, because that is the time we have together to put all of this knowledge into application.

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Narrator: Pamela, what should incoming students know about the program?

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Pamela Holden: Well, first of all, they have to want to have a love for dentistry. They have to be interested in it. If you come into this program because it is a fast paced program, you won't be able to keep up, and especially if it's not something that you're interested in. We in our program, Miss Peets and I, we strive to make sure that when they leave here that they are prepared for working chair side in a dental office, that they have the skills that they need. But it's up to the students to make sure that they have good attendance and they show up for class so that they're able to receive those skills.

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Narrator: Seems like you can't just skate through this program, can you?

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Pamela Holden: Right, exactly. It's very accelerated. And so they have to keep up. They only have to come to class on campus two days a week, but the other two days are online. So they have a lot of other classes that they have to do homework. They have to turn in, tests that they have to take. So they have to be very disciplined as far as staying on top of all of that, even though they only have to come here two days a week.

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Narrator: Doctor Alemzadeh. What's a ballpark figure about starting pay?

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Dr. Reza Alemzadeh DDS: So, I mean, um, and, you know, every practice is a little bit different as far as starting pay, but roughly, you know, it's anywhere, you know, on average is around like starting pays about 14, \$15 an hour. And you start as kind of a like almost like a junior dental assistant first. You know, a lot of offices, they bring you in as an X-ray tech first, and you kind of move up the ladder like a regional back office trainer. And I've had a lot of dental assistants to become a dental hygienist or become office manager. So the dental assisting is that stepping stone to start your career. And that's when a lot of assistants realize, hey, you know, I love assisting. I want to keep growing in the dental assistant field. Some fall in love with dental hygiene, and in order to become a dental hygienist, most programs want you to be an assistant with experience anyways. And you know, some dental assistants. You realize, hey, I like the management aspect of it and then they grow to become a lead assistant and then eventually become a go to the office management. So a lot of opportunities to grow.

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Narrator: And Michelle, as the program director, the dental assistant program seems personal to you.

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Michelle Peets: It really is. I tell my students that all the time I am literally in your face, like I'm not just in your face, I'm in your face. Your head is in my lap. My hands are in your mouth, I am in your face. And so it is a very intimate relationship. You sit with your dentist, knee to knee. You know a patient is truly in your lap and you're working on them. So it really becomes very family oriented with your patients and with your team members that you work with. And so it's a very special experience.

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Narrator: With all the teaching and outside help. This program gives you pretty much no excuse to fail.

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Michelle Peets: Correct. You don't in my class. If you can't come to me and say, hey Miss P's, I missed this, I didn't understand. There's a step I'm just confused about my job is not to dump it at you and let you figure it out. My job is to help you be successful. And so, yeah, there's there's no reason not to get it.

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Narrator: And, Pamela, as we wrap up this show, I'll give you the final word.

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Pamela Holden: I think that having taught at other private colleges, uh, the one thing that I love about working at Chatt is that Chattahoochee encourages the staff to encourage the students, and they really care about the students success. It's not just about the numbers in the chair. How many students are in the classroom, how much tuition they pay. I mean, they genuinely actually care about the students here. This is going to be a program that someone would be interested in at any age. It doesn't matter. I mean, I've had older students and I've had younger students, but like I said, you have to really want to do this because it is an accelerated program. But they offer tutoring, we offer counseling, anything that students need to try to help them maneuver through the program and make it a little easier. They have all kinds of accommodations for students who need extra help with testing. They might need to test alone. They may need to have someone read a test to them. There's all kind of accommodations for the students. So that's why I say that Chat, compared to other schools, they genuinely care about the students success.

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Narrator: Chatt Tech, the College of Real World Training, and how communities are stronger and better thanks to the thousands of Chatt Tech graduates in our local workforce. For more information about the Dental Assisting program at Chattahoochee Tech, visit Chattahoochee Tech EDU. Thanks for listening to 98.7 Chatt Tech, where 98.7% of our students earn a career.