

## **Dental School Applications Shadowing, Internships, & Volunteering**

Dental schools are increasingly using a holistic evaluation process when it comes to admissions. While GPA and DAT scores are still two of the most important factors in admissions, dental schools are looking for much more in their applicants. In fact, in a recent panel discussion, a representative of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) indicated that dental schools are looking for 13 factors in their applicants! These factors range from academic preparation to passion for the dental profession. One theme that emerges in the factors is knowledge of and experience in the field of dentistry.

So how can students demonstrate to dental schools that they are committed to the field of dentistry? The best way is to consistently make the most of every summer break starting as early as the summer between freshman and sophomore year of undergrad. During summer break, pre-dental students should be taking advantage of opportunities to gain experience in the field. Experience with patients is preferred, but any dental-related experience is a step in the right direction toward building a strong dental school application.

There are a number of ways to gain experience in the field of dentistry: shadowing, work or internships, and volunteering.

**1. Shadowing:** Students oftentimes find this option very exciting, but they don't know how to get started. The best way to find a dentist to shadow is to start with your own dentist! Many dentists are eager to help future students gain exposure to the field and are more than happy to be shadowed. If your own dentist isn't willing to let you shadow, try contacting other dentists in your area. Explain why you want to shadow them and what you want to get out of the experience. Make sure to ask questions when you are shadowing a dentist, and remember to send a thank you when your shadowing hours are complete. Some students find that they are able to build strong relationships from shadowing, and the dentists they shadow sometimes end up being great candidates for letters of recommendation.

**2. Work and Internships:** These opportunities generally take more planning to set up, so it's a good idea to start looking for work and applying for internships in the spring semester before the summer you want to land a position. Dental schools are looking for candidates who have a desire to learn about the financial commitment and compensation to having their own practice or practicing in the field. Working an administrative job that allows you to see how a practice is run can help you demonstrate this attribute in your application. And again, strong relationships with dentists that you work for can turn in to strong letters of recommendation.

**3. Volunteer:** Another great way to get to work with patients and to demonstrate a desire to succeed at patient care is through volunteering. There are many organizations and charities that need volunteer support and that allow volunteers to

work directly with patients in various capacities. Look for opportunities at local dental clinics in your area or through national organizations.

Regardless of how a student decides to gain experience in the dental field, it is important that the experience is recorded. It's not enough to just list all of the experiences on an application. Instead, dental schools are looking for how those experiences have shaped the candidate or have influenced her decisions about entering the field of dentistry. Taking good notes about these experiences while they are fresh will help students write better personal statements and speak to them in more detail in dental school interviews when it comes time later in the admissions process.