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*Inspiration: "Practice is the hardest part of learning, and training is the essence of transformation."
— Ann Voskamp, One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*

What is a Dental Surgery Assistant?

While Dental Surgery Assistants (DSAs) are not and should not be confused with being dentists nor assistant dentists, they are very valued and important healthcare professionals that work alongside dental specialists, dentists, dental therapists and oral hygienists in the treatment of patients, allowing for safe and effective oral healthcare delivery. In order to render safe oral healthcare, there is a global trend and need to professionalize Dental Surgery Assistants (DSAs), Dental Nurses or Chairside Dental Assistants (CDAs). They not only assist the dentist or other dental professionals during dental procedures, but also make note of any specific instructions or procedures to be communicated to the patient during or after the treatment. In many dental clinics or surgeries, the dental surgery assistant performs key duties related to working with patients. The job of a dental surgery assistant includes receiving patients, viewing charts, and beginning patient preparation. Often the assistant will make notes about performed procedures, progress, recommendations, and other subjects in the patient's charts. Dental Surgery assistants must ensure that surgical and dental instruments are properly cleaned and sterilized before procedures begin. Working with x-rays is common, as is processing items such as removable dental appliances, taking patient pre-and post-treatment photos and casts or impressions. While dental surgery assistants do not perform any actual surgery upon patients, they may be responsible for tasks such as checking vital signs or maintaining IV fluid flows during procedures.

Background to the project: There is a global trend and need to professionalize the Dental Surgery Assistants (DSAs). Unfortunately, there was no formal, structured training for dental surgery assistants in Zimbabwe until this programme was conceptualized. Dentists in Zimbabwe and in many of the Sub-Saharan African countries (with the exception of South African which now has formal training and statutory requirements for registration of DSAs), train their DSAs on the job in their individual surgeries. This created a big challenge when it comes to professionalism and efficiency because a dental surgery is actual a place of work not training, unless accompanied by a proper syllabus. Besides, many dentists do not have the time and sometimes not even the scope and skills to offer a structured training programme in their own surgery at the same time under pressure to attend to their patients. The Zimbabwe Academy of Dental Nursing is the first ever program offering a structured and formal training for dental surgery assistants and nurses in Zimbabwe. It is a brain child of a group of dentists and dental therapists under the leadership of Dr Moyana, who is the inaugural Director of ZADENU. He has experience in the training of dental auxiliaries and was a senior Tutor and later the Head of

the School of Dental Therapy and Technology at Parirenyatwa Central Hospital from 1989 to 1996. He is a South African trained dentist with an array of formal qualifications in the training of multi-disciplinary health care professionals. In addition to his dentistry degree his other qualifications include a Bachelor of Adult Education, Health Teachers Diploma, Master of Public Health, Master of Business Administration, Master of Philosophy in Biomedical Ethics, Three Postgraduate Diplomas or qualifications in Orthodontics, Health Research Ethics, Dental Implants, and he is completing his PhD in Bioethics and Health Law. He is the holder of an Advanced Diploma in the pedagogy of dental auxiliary training from Canada as well as an Executive Management Certificate.

Admission Requirements for the Dental Surgery Assistant Certificate: The minimum requirements for enrolment are Five (5) Ordinary Level passes, including Mathematics, English language, Science and any other 2 subjects at Grade C or better. Strict entry requirements maybe relaxed on account of proven experience. An oral interview or Aptitude/written test may be administered in the event of overwhelming responses to press adverts. English is the medium of instruction. A minimum of 10 months of Work-Integrated Learning at dental clinics, hospitals and/or private dental practices is required. Candidates from SADC countries and elsewhere should first prove that a dental facility in their country will be able to offer them attachment/extended integrated learning. Candidates must have continuous access to internet services. **A police clearance certificate may be requested for admission into the programme (unless if one is already employed, in which case a recommendation or support from employer may be requested).**

Learning activities in the programme: Both formal and non-formal assessments will be done. Practical competency and skills are assessed according to specific guidelines, which include Dental Assisting return demonstrations, oral assessments and VIVAs. Written tests and examinations will be administered during face to face sessions and at the end of the programme. It is compulsory for students to adhere to the stipulated ethical rules and dress code during practical and Work-Integrated Learning sessions at selected dental surgeries and dental centers. The student will procure recommended professional dress and clothing at own cost. Modules and other learning aids such as Cds and DVDs will be supplied as part of programme offerings. Students will not be paid (unless if they are already employed) while on attachment/integrated learning venues. The programme runs for 12 months. Subsequent face to face sessions will be run on weekends at 3 to 4 month intervals. Both formal and non-formal assessments will be done. A minimum of 10 months of Work-Integrated Learning at dental clinics, hospitals and/or private dental practices is required. Candidates from SADC countries and elsewhere should first prove that a dental facility in their country will be able to offer them attachment/extended integrated learning. This is NOT an Online programme but a digitally supported part-time programme. Practical training/attachment is organized by student himself/herself but proven fulfilment of the practical checklist of activities is needed before sitting for the final examination. **The Zimbabwe Academy of Dental Nursing may assist with arranging for attachment places (in partnership with its friendly organizations) on a first come first served basis. These attachment places may be available in the following towns and cities: Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru, Victoria Falls, Bindura, Masvingo, Zvishavane, Chinhoyi, Chitungwiza, Chipinge, Rusape and Kwekwe.**

The radiation to which a dental assistant is exposed may be detrimental to the health of an unborn child. Due to the important practical component of the course, during which students are exposed to radiation, a female student may not take x-rays or be near x-ray machines during pregnancy. Any student who suspects she may be pregnant must notify the dentist at the centre where he or she is undergoing extended integrated learning.

Qualification at Graduation: After successful completion of this **12-15-month** programme, a Dental Surgery Assistant Certificate will be awarded during the official graduation ceremony organized by the Zimbabwe Academy of Dental Nursing (ZADENU) with its participating partners or friends.

Venues for face to face sessions: Face to face contact sessions will be administered at the beginning of each three to four-month learning block at a venue to be announced in advance. All face to face sessions will be conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe. Candidates coming from outside Harare will make own accommodation arrangements. The programme may assist candidates to secure accommodation in Harare. The first face to face contact session at the beginning of training will run for full days on specified dates. Teas, lunch and stationery will be provided as part of the package.

Tests, Examinations and continuous assessments: At the end of each face to face learning block, which will be scheduled at 3 to 4 months' intervals, a 3 hour written test under examination conditions will administered to all candidates. If a candidate fails, they will be allowed to arrange for a repeat sitting for a maximum of two further attempts. During extended attachment periods candidates will expected to complete and hand in assignments. International computer drivers Licensee (ICDL) and First Aid training will be outsourced at the candidate's own cost. At the end of the programme a candidate is expected to pass a three hour written paper covering the whole syllabus. An oral examination will be arranged for candidates who are below 50% but with a subminimum of 45%. A candidate who withdraws before completing the programme may be given a testimonial letter upon completing at least 6 months of training.

Registration of the programme: This training programme is registered with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education-Science and Technology Development, in Zimbabwe. The programme is also endorsed by the Research Council of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Dental Association. Graduates of this programme are not yet registrable with the Medical and Dental Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe (MDPCZ) because currently there is no legal or statutory requirements for the registration of dental surgery assistants (DSAs) in Zimbabwe. The graduates of this programme should not expect to be registered in Zimbabwe as DSAs although it may be possible in future for them to present their certificate, upgrade or convert to future programs if the register for DSAs is opened at the MDPCZ or at any of the councils under the Health Professionals Act. The graduates of this programme will be expected to secure their own employment (if not already employed) during or after the training. **All the Lectures, tutorials, learning materials, tests, examination, preparation of transcript and certification will be prepared and presented by and through The Zimbabwe Academy of Dental Nursing (ZADENU).**

Who does the programme target? The programme targets serving/experienced and school leavers in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Development Coordinating Countries (SADC) who wish to acquire a formal qualification in dental nursing or surgery assisting. This initiative is poised to raise the standard of dental assisting and nursing in Zimbabwe and Sub-Saharan Africa, with a medium to long term vision of enlarging capacity to include dental hygienists as well. The project is run on a cost-recovery basis as it currently does not have a sponsor to subsidize the training costs. The programme is run on a modular basis, interspersed with extended experiential learning/practical/attachment/work-integrated learning at private dental surgeries, quasi-public dental facilities and government dental clinics. The pedagogical approach is unique in that it harnesses the power of internet learning, modules, long distance learning, Informal and Non-formational aspects of Adult education as well as experiential work integrated training. The programme runs for 12 months leading to the conferment of a Certificate in Dental Assisting under the seal of the Zimbabwe Academy of Dental Nursing. At 3 or 4 months' intervals the group will meet for 2 to 5 days for theoretical inputs and additional formal assessments. The experiential learning/attachment phase will be laden with assignments and on-line continuous learning. The face to face sessions will be mainly focused on basic sciences and commercial subjects such as Anatomy, Physiology, dental materials, Photography, Dental Assisting theory, radiology, microbiology/hygiene, DHE, First Aid (may be outsourced from MARS, EMRAS or St Johns Ambulance), Public Relations, marketing, Health law and medical ethics, record keeping, Computer literacy (ICDL qualification will be outsourced and a requirement before final examination or graduation).

Programme Fees: Programme Fees

The total programme fees is **USD 2100** broken down as follows:

1. Deposit at registrations USD 1500
2. The balance to be paid before registration for third face to face block
3. Full payment before beginning of programme earns a 15% discount
4. All fees paid are NON refundable.

These fees will cover learning materials such as modules, cds and DvDs but excludes uniforms required to worn at all times during attachment/integrated learning. **If a candidate is already employed they will be exempted from wearing the Academy uniform while on attachment.**

For further details, refer to our website on www.zadenu.org where you can download an application form, or send your enquiry to info@zadenu.org