



# Insights into the Dental Practice

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Juliane M. Birke, jumabi@umd.edu

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## Service Site

I decided to complete my practicum at the Friendship Heights Family and Cosmetic Dentistry, a dental office located in Washington D.C. I was interested in learning about the different aspects of a dentist's job including doctor-patient interactions and basic dentistry.

The office is owned by Dr. Sheri Nawabi. After earning her Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree, Dr. Nawabi went on to specialize in Prosthodontics and TMJ occlusion at Georgetown University in D.C. The services offered at the office include comprehensive dental treatment, cosmetic services, orthodontics and oral surgery. Besides Dr. Nawabi, the staff includes two receptionists, three dental assistants, a general dentist, an orthodontist, and a oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

## Activities

My work included shadowing and assisting Dr. Nawabi. I got the opportunity to observe several procedures including the following common ones.

-Scaling and root planing: a treatment for inflammation of the gum. Poor dental hygiene can lead to many complaints, a common one being disease of the gum. It can discomfort the patient by causing pain and bleeding. The hardened plaque and bacteria attach to the tooth's surface below the gum line. To remove them, the dentist has to reach into the space between the tooth and gum with special metal and scraping tools. Because this is painful, local anesthetics are applied.

-Tooth filling: Another consequence of not brushing and flossing correctly can be cavities which is basically decay of the tooth. The fillings can be used to restore the morphology of the tooth. Composite is one filling material that, unlike silver, looks natural. Before the fillings are placed, plaque and bacteria are removed and adhesion is applied to the tooth. A UV curing light is used to activate a light sensitive reaction that hardens the filling material and adheres it to the tooth.

-Replacing crowns: Like fillings, crowns are used for restoring teeth that have decayed or got damaged in other ways. They are also used for cosmetic purposes. Crowns cover the top of the tooth and can be made of various materials like porcelain and metals. A crown usually stays put several years. It eventually falls out and has to be reattached by the dentist. To do so, cement is used to fasten the crown on the tooth, and the UV cure light is used to speed up the hardening of the cement.

While I was observing different procedures, I assisted Dr. Nawabi in handing her tools and materials or holding the suction tube which removes excess saliva. I also assisted in taking x-ray pictures. To offer a helping hand, I did other various things like manage patient's charts, answering the phone and putting used tools in the sanitizing machine.



## Impact

My work and observations at the dentist office taught me various things. Not so surprisingly, one important lesson I learned is to brush and floss my teeth more often. Beside learning about different problems regarding denture and gum, and how to treat them, I gained valuable insights into doctor- patient interactions and managing an office. Many people do not like going to the doctor and especially many feel uncomfortable going to the dentist. Dr. Nawabi makes jokes with her patients and shows interest in their private lives. This helps the patients relax which not only makes him or her have a more comfortable treatment, but also facilitates the dentist's job. Smooth communication between the dentist and patient in general is crucial. Many patients complain that their health care provider does not listen to them or does not understand them. Because many of Dr. Nawabi's patients speak Spanish as their first language, she taught herself the language. Her patients noticeably appreciate that.

From my conversations to Dr. Nawabi, I learned the importance and necessity of liking your job as a health professional. Receiving a dental or medical degree requires many years of schooling and training, much money and tremendous discipline. To open a private office requires no less effort. You need to be passionate about your job to accomplish all this and feel that it was worth it. I will certainly keep this in mind when deciding on the path to take in the field of healthcare.

## Future Work

If I decide to pursue a career in the dental field, I will for sure come back to work at Friendship Heights Family and Cosmetic Dentistry. I enjoyed shadowing Dr. Nawabi and found it a valuable experience. In the future, I will try to shadow different health professionals to explore my interests further and broaden my understanding of practicing medicine.

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