



## Dentists — Paid Too Much or Not Enough?

Unfortunately, dentists often get a bad rap. People are more fearful of going to them than regular doctors, for one thing. Then those patients who do have work done complain about the costs associated with dental care. That raises an interesting question about how much you should charge for services if you find dental jobs that meet your needs. Let's explore both sides of the argument and look at some reasons.

### Dentists Are Paid Too Much

With the economy spiraling downward in the United States, many people are starting to tighten their belts and hold onto the little money they have left a little more tightly. That means some have even started putting off trips to the dentist. Of course, this has had some impact on [dental job openings](#), but more importantly, it has caused stronger vocalizations about complaints regarding the expense of going to the dentist.

Even with [dental insurance](#), it is not uncommon to pay \$450 for a root canal required to save a single tooth. Other people complain that a single dental visit can cost them as much as \$50 just for the co-pay, if they are insured, while major work is usually in the hundreds-of-dollars range and is only partially covered by insurance. For those who have no dental insurance, affording a trip to the dentist probably is not in the cards.

Because so many people do have to struggle to cover the costs of dental work, they argue that the prices for dentists are exorbitant. But is that a solid argument?

### Dentists Are Paid Enough or Not Enough

If you are getting into [dental sales jobs](#), you might need to explain to people why dentists charge so much. After all, we can probably all agree that the charges are fairly steep for the average consumer.

First, the training required to become a [dentist](#) is expensive. Besides getting an undergraduate degree, dentists must complete four years of dental school. While prices for bachelor's-degree programs vary greatly, the average cost for four years of dental school is around \$160,000 to \$225,000. That is a hefty amount of debt to have on one's shoulders. Financial aid, scholarships, and family contributions may help some, but the high cost of training is something that is reflected in the prices charged for all dental services.

Second, dentists have to run a business, and that requires overhead. Whether your dentist shares a practice with other professionals or works alone, he or she is going to be responsible for paying to keep the practice running. Those costs include basic expenses such as the rent for the location, the costs of lights, heating, water, and communication services, as well as the payroll of the staff, insurance requirements, and usually cleaning services to keep the building hygienic. Most dentists have a fairly high overhead and these expenses have to come out of their revenue before they can take a dime in profits. As a result, most of those costs for dental services are going towards overhead and not a dentist's greed.

Finally, keeping a dental practice well-supplied with the tools and supplies needed to treat a steady stream of patients is costly. Much of the large equipment, including dental chairs, was either included in the purchase of the practice or is leased from companies supplying such products. Proper sterilization equipment and products can be quite expensive but are necessary for the health of patients. The numbing agents, nitrous oxide, and other chemicals used in the practice do not come cheap either. Plus, the office will require basic office supplies such as manila folders, copier paper, and pens. And don't forget the magazine subscriptions which are required to keep the waiting patients entertained in the lobby.

All of these expenses add up quickly and drive up the costs of dental procedures. Not to mention making those insurance claims is time-consuming and takes up a lot of paperwork and staff. Even those costs have to be added into the charges for services.

### The Bottom Line on Dental Costs

If you are planning on becoming a dentist or working in the dental industry, be prepared for negative comments about the pricing. However, most dentists are either charging the correct price or charging too little for their services. Education,



## Dental Career Feature

supplies, and overhead costs add up and have to be passed on to the consumers.

That does not mean you might not want to consider offering some assistance to patients with financial difficulties.

Accepting partial payments for co-payments or allowing patients to make payment arrangements can be helpful and can ensure that your current practice does not lose too much business during this economic downturn.

Even though dentists have every right to set their own fees, it is important for them to also be compassionate about their

patients' own financial hardships during a tough economic period. The good thing is that understanding dentists now are more likely to be paid back with repeat visits and patient referrals when the economy improves.

If you are a dentist who keeps hearing complaints about what you charge, consider typing up a brief letter that explains all of the expenses that keep the practice up and running and passing it out to patients or posting it in the waiting room.

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