

Northwest Tribal Dental Support Center

Tip Sheet for Interviewing Dentists for IHS/Tribal Dental Programs

Recruiting and retaining dentists can be challenging for an IHS/Tribal dental program. Selecting the right candidate for your program is essential to providing the best care for your community. We offer this tip sheet and list of interview questions to assist you in this process.

Before the Interview

Dentists come from many different backgrounds and areas of expertise. Also, motivations and interests vary from candidate to candidate. Besides reviewing the resume and contacting references, there are two key components to finding the best candidate for the mission of your program.

1. Ensure that the candidate understands the position. Either send them a copy of the position description that actually represents what you are expecting of the dentist, or write a paragraph specific to your needs and expectations. The Dental Support Center can help you with this. The following is an example:

We provide basic dental care to our patients (amalgams, composites, extractions, SRP, anterior and bicuspid endo, stainless steel crowns and pulpotomies, prophys, sealants, fluoride varnish, and minimally invasive dentistry using glass ionomer). There is no "selling" involved. About 35% of our patient population is pediatric, and we have high rates of early childhood caries. Although we have resources to refer the most difficult children, all general dentists are expected to treat pediatric patients. It is expected that all dentists provide basic restorative dentistry, minor oral surgery and the treatment of orofacial infection.

2. Include an in-person or Skype interview because this is indispensable in evaluating candidates for your program.

Examples of Interview Questions

Good Opening Questions

- Can you tell us why you are interested in this position?
- Can you walk us through your experience and how you think it might relate to this position?
- Tell us a little about who you are, both professionally and personally.

Key Skills (this is your chance to ask questions specific to the position. For instance, if you're planning to build or expand your dental program, you might ask if the dentist has any experience with this. The list below reflects some key skills specific to working in IHS/Tribal dental programs.)

- Can you describe any experience you have working in public health or community dental programs?

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- How comfortable are you working with young children and please describe any experience you have treating children under the age of 3? Do you have experience with minimally-invasive dentistry?
- Fluoride: Tell us your views on water fluoridation and fluoride varnish
- Dental Sealants: Tell us your views on dental sealants for children.
- Tell us about your experience with complex dentistry including extractions and root canals.
- Do you have any strong feelings about incorporating expanded function dental assistants and/or dental therapists into your practice?

This would be a good time to ask how many patients they would be comfortable seeing a day and if you use expanded function dental assistants or have a DHAT, you'll want to ask the candidate if they are willing to work with these expanded function dental staff.

Leadership

- Can you tell us about any leadership experiences that you have had?
- If you wanted to change a dental clinic policy, what steps would you take?

Interpersonal/Communication Skills

- A patient arrives late. How would you handle it?
- A patient is frustrated because you left them waiting. How would you handle it?
- A new patient is experiencing anxiety; what steps would you take next?
- Tell us about a time you had a disagreement with a staff member and how you handled it *or* describe a difficult situation you had with a patient or staff member and how you handled it.

Follow-Up Questions. After you describe the position, you might want to see how the position aligns with the applicant's experience and interests.

- Now that you understand the position, what do you think will be most challenging for you?
- Are there areas that we could help you with by providing more continuing dental education opportunities?
- What do you think is most rewarding about being a dentist?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Additional tips to help you secure the right dentist for your community

- Provide tips for traveling to your community like the nearest airport, need for a rental car, etc.
- Provide tips for site seeing or offer a tour of local sites that might interest the candidate.
- If possible, share a meal with the candidate. This will give you an opportunity to get to know the person on a more personal level.
- Share some local culture. Explain tribal art pieces on display, talk a bit about some local customs, foods, and wellness practices.
- Ask the candidate why they are interested in living in your part of the country. This will give you hints about what you might highlight, whether it is hunting, fishing, gardening, or being near family.

