Best job of 2013: Dentist

‘U.S. News 100 Best Jobs’ list also puts dental hygienists in top 10

By Robert Selleck, Managing Editor

Based on comprehensive analysis of seven components thought to define the desirability of a profession, U.S. News & World Report has determined that for 2013 the best job in the United States is: dentist.

The intent of the report is to provide an intuitive method to compare professions based on components that matter most: the number of openings, the chance to advance and be professionally fulfilled, and the ability to meet financial obligations.

With an overall weighted-average score of 8.4 out of 10, the dental profession beat out other top-10 finishers such as physician, pharmacist and software developer.

Another dental-industry profession to make it into the top 10 was “dental hygienist,” at No. 10 overall and No. 6 among health-care jobs.

Heaviest weighting among the seven components examined, at 30 percent, was the category of “median salary.” A profession’s projected growth in the decade ahead received 20 percent of the weighted averages in the rankings. The other components being measured were job prospects (20 percent), unemployment rate (20 percent), stress level (5 percent) and work-life balance (5 percent).

The profession of dentistry scored well across the board. In terms of expected growth, the report said, “The need for professionals to examine our teeth, fill and (in some cases) refill our cavities isn’t fading. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts employment growth of about 21 percent between 2010 and 2020, above the average for all occupations. Work opportunities are especially plentiful for those who work in traditional dentist offices and other health practitioner offices. There should be more than 25,000 new openings in this profession in the next eight years.”

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The report included Bureau of Labor Statistics figures that put the 2011 median salary for dentists at $142,740. The range between higher earners and lower earners was listed as $187,999 to $74,490. Differences in geographic location and market population base, were referred to as contributing factors in salary differences. Among the best-paying cities listed for dentists were Rocky Mount, N.C., Asheville, N.C., Tyler, Texas, Abilene, Texas, and Manchester, N.H., each with annual median wages greater than $250,000.

In summarizing what being a dentist entails, U.S. News reported: “Ever heard the phrase ‘Your face is your fortune?’ For dentists, our smile is their fortune. They earn their living diagnosing and treating teeth and gums, performing oral surgery, and counseling and educating us on maintaining proper oral health.”

Dental hygienist profession No. 10
To even be considered for the top-100 list, a profession first had to meet the initial cut based on projected growth. And the dental hygiene profession seemed especially strong in that area. The initial 100 jobs were identified based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for projected number of openings through 2020. Once that batch was isolated, additional data was analyzed to determine the ranking.

Here’s how the report summed up projected demand for hygienists: “Employment for all dental hygienists will swell nearly 40 percent by 2020, which is faster than the average growth rate for most professions. In 2010, there were 181,800 hygienists, and that number should increase by nearly 70,000 new positions.” But it wasn’t just growth projections that got the profession of dental hygienist into the top 10 (and No. 6 among health-care jobs). The profession’s income range also ranked high. “Hygienists make a comfortable salary, especially considering that most of those in the profession work part-time. In 2011, their median salary was $69,280. The best-paid earned $94,850, and the bottom 10 percent earned $46,020,” U.S. News reported.

The top-10 professions in order from No.1 through No.10: dentist, registered nurse, pharmacist, computer systems analyst, physician, database administrator, software developer, physical therapist, web developer and dental hygienist. The complete U.S. News report can be seen at www.money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/rankings.
Gooey bath remineralizes teeth

Taking inspiration from nature, scientists are reporting an advance toward preventing the tooth sensitivity that affects millions of people around the world. Their report on development of the substance, similar to the adhesive that mussels use to attach to rocks and other surfaces in water, appears in the American Chemical Society journal, ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces.

Quan-Li Li, Chun Hung Chu and colleagues explain that about three out of every four people have teeth that are sensitive to hot, cold, sweet or sour foods and drinks. It occurs when the hard outer enamel layer on teeth and the softer underlying dentin wear away, stimulating the nerves inside. Some sugar-free gums and special toothpastes can help reduce such tooth hypersensitivity. However, Li and Chu cite the need for substances that re-build both enamel and dentin at the same time. To meet that challenge, they turned to a sticky material similar to the adhesive that mussels use to adhere to surfaces. They reasoned that it could help keep minerals in contact with dentin long enough for the rebuilding process to occur.

They describe laboratory tests that involved bathing human teeth with worn-away enamel and dentin in liquid containing the sticky material and minerals. Teeth bathed in the sticky material and minerals reformed dentin and enamel. However, teeth bathed just in minerals reformed only enamel. The gooey substance "may be a simple universal technique to induce enamel and dentin remineralization simultaneously," they concluded. The authors acknowledge funding from a National Natural Science Foundation of China Research Grants Council grant, the Outstanding Youth Fund, from the board of education of Anhui province and the Youth Foundation of the Anhui Provincial Natural Science Foundation.

(Source: American Chemical Society)