

Dental Anesthesiology Residency

Notes From the ADEA Residency Series

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Residency Series, co-sponsored with the Office of Career and Professional Development and UCSF ADEA chapter. A current DA resident at an out of state program shared their thoughts about the qualities of an outstanding candidate in their specialty, and gave advice to D1s, D2, & D3s about the application process and residency experience.

Exploring Dental Anesthesiology

Q: What is a day in the life of a dental anesthesiologist resident like?

A: Dental Anesthesiology residency is a 3 year hospital based specialization program. Every year can look different, and the curriculum varies on each program. At Stony Brook's DA program, residents are from day 1 paired with an attending or 3rd year resident on sedation cases. There is a large learning curve compared to dental school. In dental school you are treating a patient with a crown, then in DA residency you are sitting in on an OR case. Because they are distinct fields, DA residents are not working on the hand skills they have developed during dental schools. Some patient care and clinical skills do transfer. DA residents will focus on pharmacology and medical didactics. Residents are paid a salary same rate as other medical residents.

A day in the life of a DA resident in their first year requires you to be in the hospital almost daily, training with other dental anesthesiologist residents and medical anesthesiologist residents. In the first year there is no call. This gives residents time to study material and notes from each day's experience, "which is a plus". At Stony Brook, dental anesthesiologists join the medical anesthesia in their OR rotations. The DA residents will learn to do sedations and other procedures for a broad range of cases. The main focus of the program is to prepare DAs to provide mobile anesthesia; therefore, later on the DA's focus more on head and neck procedures and in some residencies will go on rotations for months to solely do mobile anesthesia. In addition, residents can do research during their program.

In the hospital, you can rely on your team of other medical staff to support and back you up in case anything happens, but the key thing is that when you are done and working after residency, you may have a nurse or be alone, and the DA is the one who calls the shots and whose liable.

Q: What is a day in the life of a dental anesthesiologist like?

A: A majority of DA's work via traveling to different practices and providing sedation services to these clinics. Though DAs can still practice dentistry, many choose to not. A smaller group of DAs can work in hospitals, academia, some open their own practices or surgical centers. DA's can work as a contractor or can work and as associate by joining an established group that already has a running relationship with dental clinics. DAs can own all of their equipment that they have purchased by themselves or be hired as an associate and sometimes be given equipment, which may mean that it could be taken from their overall income.

DAs work mainly with pediatric dental clinics, sometimes with oral surgeons and endodontist. DAs in general have to wake up early on work days to make their commutes as they usually start sedating patients early in the morning. They may prepare their equipment the night before or the morning of. Commutes can vary, can be short if its nearby or can be 1-2+ hours away. DA's choose which patients they can see at the dental office depending on their medical history or can refer them to the hospital.

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Overall, dental anesthesiologists work hard and provide a great service that promote access to care to patients with complicated needs. They have responsibility for patient's lives and during the sedation they are alert and ready. Although they are usually not doing the surgical procedure, they are actively monitoring everything that is going on.

Q: What is required to specialize?

A: There are only 9 programs within the United States that offer Dental Anesthesiology residency as of 2025. Each program may accept between 2-3 new residents every year. This is because the specialty was recently accepted by the ADA in 2019. This makes the application competitive.

The requirements for DA residency are similar to the requirements for oral surgery with a similar timeline. According to panelist, the biggest factors in having a strong application is scoring well on the CBSE and going to several externships, at least one or two programs. Letters of recommendation are very significant and building rapport with dental anesthesiologists who you have shadowed and can vouch for your work ethic, personality, and interest in dental anesthesiology.

When applying in your 3rd year of dental school, the applicant can look online at each program's website. PASS has a search feature that allows applicants to look at program overviews and what each program wants in the application. Panelists recommended double-checking the information on PASS with the school websites to confirm the information. Certify all mail and call the school or program to make sure they've received all materials. If applicants are planning on doing an externship after they apply, just write "planned 00/00 to 00/00" in the PASS application and on the CV.

Q: Where do you see the field developing in the future?

A: Panelist mentioned there is a great need and demand for dental anesthesiologists in the country. There are states where there are maybe 1 or no dental anesthesiologists and this can provide opportunities for dental anesthesiologists. There are also established groups in other states who are ready to hire dental anesthesiologists. The first healthcare workers to use anesthesia were dentists and although the DA specialty was recently only accredited by the ADA, this means there is a lot of growth to be expected in this field. There are only 9 programs, and hopefully more programs can open in other institutions. Currently UCSF does not have a Dental Anesthesia program as of 2025. Each state has different regulations and rules for anesthesia providers. Overall, this career has a positive outlook for growth.