

### Ethical issues and challenges in dental practice

#### 1. Access to dental care:

A dentist should be available to provide care for potentially health threatening dental conditions and to decrease pain and suffering.

A dentist must not restrict the access to dental care services beyond the limits of laws. Barriers that limit the access of physically impaired people should be eliminated to extent that can be reasonably fulfilled. Dental professionals must know the laws and regulations that govern discrimination and access to dental care services.

2. Abuse of prescriptions by patients: The dentist must be aware of patients' legitimate needs for prescription drugs. The dentist should be suspicious when patients' desires for prescription drugs materially conflict with professional recommendations. The dentist should confront patients when non-confrontation would imply tacit approval of drug abuse. In a case of suspected drug abuse, the dentist has a responsibility to refer the patient for evaluation. There may be instances where the dentist must cooperate with appropriate governmental and law enforcement agencies to curb such abuse. Close communication may also be necessary with pharmacies and other practitioners to curb abuse. The dentist has an ethical obligation to avoid becoming an enabler.

### 3. Advertising:

Advertising is acceptable by most professional organizations but when it is used, it must never be false or misleading. Advertising done in proper way may help people to understand the dental care available for them and how they can get it. Advertising must not: misrepresent fact and fee, create false expectations of good results, guarantee atypical results and imply unusual conditions. There are many strategies that a dentist can use to build successful practice without breaking the law.

A dentist can establish good rapport and strong customer base by various ways such as providing excellent dental care, demonstrating their clinical skills, a warm welcome of patient, a pleasant environment in dental office, free checkups and comparatively low fees.

Communication is also an important factor in advertising. Good communication can improve both patient and staff interest and expectations. Studies reported that dentist can use internal communication such as practice brochure, business cards, in-house information centres, thank you notes and direct mail to patients. The aim of this should be to convey the clinic's services in a patient specific and caring tone. Radio, television and newspaper advertisements are not as effective as internal communication methods such as newsletters, press release and personalized letters.

### 4. Emergency care:

A dentist should be available, within reason, to address acute dental conditions. A person with an emergent dental condition should be examined and either treated or referred for treatment.

In such situations, the patient's health and comfort must be the dentist's primary concern, not compensation or convenience. If a dentist cannot accommodate the patient's emergent needs, a reasonable effort should be made to have the patient seen in a timely manner by someone capable of treating the condition.

#### 5. Financial arrangements:

Fee for dental treatment should be consistent and fair to all patients. Fee should not vary based on patient's financial status, including insurance plans. In non-emergency conditions fee and payment options should be explained to patient prior to start of any dental procedure.

#### 6. Disclosure and misrepresentaon:

Dentists should accurately represent themselves to the public and their peers. The dentist has an obligation to represent professional qualifications accurately without overstatement of fact or implying credentials that do not exist. A dentist has an obligation to avoid shaping the conclusions or perceptions of patients or other professionals by withholding or altering information that is needed for accurate assessment. The dentist has an obligation to disclose commercial relationships with companies when recommending products of those companies. The dentist has an obligation to disclose commercial relationships in professional presentations or publications where the dentist promotes or features products of those companies. The dentist may ethically have ties to commercial entities, but the dentist should fully disclose such relationships to patients and professional colleagues when nondisclosure would lead to differing conclusions, perceptions, or misrepresentation. Incomplete disclosure and misrepresentation may also adversely

affect dental research and journalism. In the course of evaluating research and dental literature, dentists are cautioned that such problems may exist and can lead to incorrect assumptions and conclusions. If such incorrect assumptions and conclusions are adopted, less than proper care may result. It is important that dentists critically evaluate dental research, literature, and advertising claims.

#### 7. Child abuse:

Dentists are positioned to detect certain acts of child abuse, particularly to the perioral area. Cases of child abuse must be reported to the appropriate authorities. Suspicious incidents require documentation and careful investigation. A dentist may need to compromise patient confidentiality by conferring with authorities or medical personnel as a part of an investigation. The dentist must be cautious when drawing conclusions or making accusations, as an error in judgment may cause irreparable harm to the reputation and quality of life of those involved.