

## Dental Ethics

### Principal features of dental ethics

Lec. 7&8

Dr. Ammar Hadi Shaalan

Patients who used to accept dentists' advice unquestioningly sometimes ask dentists to defend their recommendations if these are different from information obtained from other oral health practitioners or the Internet. If they are dissatisfied with the results of dental treatment, no matter what the cause, an increasing number of patients are turning to the courts to obtain compensation from dentists.

### What's Special about Dentistry?

Dentistry continues to be a profession that is highly valued by the people who need its services. It also continues to attract large numbers of the most gifted, hardworking and dedicated students.

Dentistry is a recognised profession. At the same time, however, it is a commercial enterprise (تسليع)، whereby dentists employ their skills to earn a living. There is a potential tension between these two aspects of dentistry and maintaining an appropriate balance between them is often difficult.

People come to dentists for help with some of their most pressing needs – relief from pain and suffering and restoration of oral health and well-being.

They allow dentists to see, touch and manipulate their bodies.

They disclose information about themselves that they would not want others to know.

Some dentists may be tempted to minimise their commitment to professionalism in order to increase their income, for example by aggressive advertising and/or specializing in lucrative (تجزيم) cosmetic procedures. If taken too far, such activities can diminish the public's respect for and trust in the entire dental profession with the result that dentists will be regarded as just another set of entrepreneurs (لاجر لاعلوا) who place their own

interests above those of the people they serve. Such behavior is in conflict with the requirement of the FDI International Principles of Ethics for the Dental Profession that “the dentist should act in a manner which will enhance the prestige and reputation of the profession.”

### **What's Special about Dental Ethics?**

It is important that dentists know and exemplify the core values of dentistry, especially

compassion, competence and autonomy. These values, along with respect for fundamental human rights, serve as the foundation of dental ethics.

Compassion: defined as understanding and concern for another person's distress, is essential for the practice of dentistry.

Competence: scientific knowledge and technical skills that they have to develop and maintain but their ethical knowledge, skills and attitudes as well.

Autonomy: (self-determination): is the core value of dentistry that has evolved the most over the years. Individual dentists have traditionally enjoyed a high degree of clinical autonomy in deciding where and how to practice.

Besides its adherence to these three core values, dental ethics differs from the general ethics applicable to everyone by being publicly proclaimed (إعلاناً) in a code of ethics or similar document.

### **Who decides what Ethical is?**

The answer to the question, “who decides what is ethical for people in general?” varies from one society to another and even within the same society.

In liberal societies

Individuals have a great deal of freedom to decide for themselves what is ethical, although they will likely be influenced by their families, friends, religion, the media and other external sources.

In more traditional societies,

There is greater agreement on ethics and greater social pressure, sometimes backed by laws, to act in certain ways rather than others. In such societies culture and religion often play a dominant role in determining ethical behavior. Family and clan elders خوپش رئاشعلا, religious authorities and political leaders usually have a greater role than individuals in determining what is ethical.

For dentists, the question, “who decides what is ethical?” has until recently had a somewhat different answer than for people in general. During the past two centuries the dental profession has developed its own standards of behavior for its members, which are expressed in codes of ethics and related policy documents. At a global level, the FDI has set forth a broad range of ethical statements that specify the behavior required of dentists no matter where they live and practice (see the Appendix علاطیل). In many, if not most, countries dental associations have been responsible for developing and enforcing the applicable ethical standards. Depending on the country’s approach to health law, these standards may have legal status.

The human rights that are especially important for dental ethics include the rights to freedom from discrimination زیپملا, to freedom of opinion and expression, to equal access to public services in one’s country, and to health care.

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- Dental codes of ethics and policy statements reflect a general consensus about the way dentists should act and they should be followed unless there are good reasons for acting otherwise.

Why dental profession's privilege زایمتا of being able to determine its own ethical standards has never been absolute?

- Dentists have always been subject to the general laws of the land and have sometimes been punished for acting contrary to these laws.
- Some dental organisations are strongly influenced by religious teachings, which impose ضرفي additional obligations on their members besides those applicable to all dentists.
- In many countries the organisations that set the standards for dentists' behaviour and monitor their compliance now have a significant non-dentist membership.

### **Does Dental Ethics Change?**

There are general evolution in the patient-dentist relationship that gives rise to different ethical obligations for dentists than previously.eg. Obtaining patient's informed consent.

Despite these obvious changes in dental ethics, there is widespread agreement among dentists that the fundamental values and ethical principles of dentistry do not, or at least should not, change. Since it is inevitable that human beings will always be subject to oral disease, they will continue to have need of compassionate, competent and autonomous dentists to care for them.

### **Does Dental Ethics Differ from One Country to Another?**

There is a significant difference of opinion among national dental associations about advertising for example. Some associations forbid it but others are neutral and still others accept it under certain conditions.

In some countries there is considerable interest in the ethical issues posed by advanced dental technology whereas in countries that do not have access to such technology, these ethical issues do not arise.

Dentists in some countries are confident that they will not be forced by their government to do anything unethical while in other countries it may be difficult for them to meet their ethical obligations, for example, to maintain

the confidentiality of patients in the face of police or army requirements to report 'suspicious' injuries; any such encouragement of dentists to act unethically should be a matter of great concern.

Dentists throughout the world have much in common, and when they come together in organizations such as the FDI, they usually achieve agreement on controversial ethical issues, though this often requires lengthy debate. The fundamental values of dental ethics, such as compassion, competence and autonomy, along with dentists' experience and skills in all aspects of dentistry, provide a sound basis for analysing ethical issues in dentistry and arriving at solutions that are in the best interests of individual patients and citizens and public health in general.

### **The Role of the FDI**

As the only international organization that seeks to represent all dentists, regardless of nationality or specialty, the FDI has undertaken the role of establishing general standards in dental ethics that are applicable worldwide. In addition to the International Principles of Ethics for the Dental Profession, the FDI has adopted policy statements on many specific ethical issues as well as other issues related to oral health, oral health policies and the dental profession (see the Appendix )

## Appendix

### **FDI World Dental Federation International Principles of Ethics for the Dental Profession**

**These International Principles of Ethics for the Dental Profession should be considered as guidelines for every dentist. These guidelines cannot cover all local, national, traditions, legislation or circumstances.**

#### **The professional dentist:**

- will practice according to the art and science of dentistry and to the principles of humanity**
- will safeguard the oral health of patients irrespective of their individual status**

**The primary duty of the dentist is to safeguard the oral health of patients. However, the dentist has the right to decline to treat a patient, except for the provision of emergency care, for humanitarian reasons, or where the laws of the country dictate otherwise.**

- should refer for advice and/or treatment any patient requiring a level of competence beyond that held. The needs of the patient are the overriding concern and the dentist should refer for advice or treatment any**

**patient requiring a level of dental competence greater than he/she possesses.**

- must ensure professional confidentiality of all information about patients and their treatment. The dentist must ensure that all staff respect patients confidentiality except where the laws of the country dictate otherwise.**

- must accept responsibility for, and utilise dental auxiliaries strictly according to the law. The dentist must accept full responsibility for all treatment undertaken, and no treatment or service should be delegated**

**to a person who is not qualified or is not legally permitted to undertake this.**

- **must deal ethically in all aspects of professional life and adhere to rules of professional law**
- **should continue to develop professional knowledge and skills**

**The dentist has a duty to maintain and update professional competence through continuing education through his/her active professional life.**

- **should support oral health promotion. The dentist should participate in oral health education and should support and promote accepted measures to improve the oral health of the public.**
- **should be respectful towards professional colleagues and staff. The dentist should behave towards all members of the oral health team in a professional manner and should be willing to assist colleagues professionally and maintain respect for divergence of professional opinion.**
- **should act in a manner which will enhance the prestige and reputation of the profession.**