

Dental ethics

Professional ethics review

Lec. 1&2

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What is a “profession”?

A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards. This group possess special knowledge and skills derived from research, education and training at a high level.

What is a “professional”?

A professional is a member of a profession.

Four qualities have been attributed to those who practice a profession:

1. A professional has respect for human beings;
2. A professional is competent);
3. A professional has integrity
4. A professional’s primary concern is service, not prestige or profit

These qualities are consistently reflected in the decisions and actions of a professional.

What is “professionalism”?

Professionalism (professional +ethics) professional values and ethics as evidenced in behavior and comportment that reflects the values and ethics of psychology, integrity and responsibility.

Individual professionalism depend on an attitude, pride, loyalty, responsibility, openness to critique and honesty.

Professionalism extends ethics to include the conduct, aims, and qualities that characterize a professional or a profession.

Professionalism embodies positive habits of conduct, judgment, and perception on the part of both individual professionals and professional organizations.

Professionals and professional organizations give priority to the wellbeing and self-determination of the patients they serve.

Dentists can clearly claim for themselves several of the most common characteristics of professions and professionals:

Dentists possess a distinctive expertise that consists of both theoretical knowledge and skills for applying it in practice

Dentists' expertise is a source of important benefits for those who seek their assistance because of their expertise, dentists are accorded extensive autonomy in matters pertaining to it.

To become a professional, the dentist should undertake certain obligations.

Do we really have obligations to patients?

By agreeing to take part in the dentist-patient relationship, both patients and dentists accept certain obligations or duties.

Both accept a responsibility to disclose information pertinent to the relationship. The dentist is obligated to respect patient privacy, maintain patient confidences, keep promises, be truthful, and consider patient values and personal preferences in treatment decisions.

Eight categories of professional obligations have been described:

1. Chief Client—the chief client is the person or set of persons whose well-being the profession and its members are chiefly committed to serving;
2. Ideal Relationship between Dentist and Patient—an ideal relationship is based on mutual respect and recognizes that the dentist and patient both bring important values to the professional setting.
3. Central Values—the focus of each profession's expertise is a certain set of values, and each profession is obligated to work to secure these values for its clients.
4. Competence—every professional is obligated to acquire and maintain the expertise necessary to undertake professional tasks;
5. Relative Priority of the Patient's Well-being—while the well-being of the patient is to be given considerable priority, it is not to be given absolute priority;
6. Ideal Relationships Between Co-professionals—There does not seem to be any one account of ideal relationships between dentists and their co-professionals because so many different categories must be considered, but there are professional obligations to co-professionals;
7. Relationship Between Dentistry and the Larger Community—the activities of every profession also involve relationships between the profession as a group or its members and the larger community and nonprofessional groups and others within it;
8. Integrity and Education—These are subtle components of conduct by which a person communicates what he or she stands for, not only in the acts the person chooses, but also

both in how those acts are chosen and in how the person presents to others in carrying them

Can dentistry be both a business and a profession?

Dentists run small businesses. Patients pay for treatment (with or without subsidy), and the dentist pays for the expenses of managing and improving the practice. The remaining profit becomes the dentist's income or return on investment. There is always a risk that a dentist with a weak sense of integrity may resort to unprofessional behavior to make a larger profit or even just to remain solvent. While a dentist needs to adopt sound business principles to stay viable, this should be done with attention to ethical and professional rules.

While dentistry is first a profession, the practice of dentistry usually involves financial compensation for professional services.

Such compensation necessitates, by its very nature, some form of business structure to accommodate these transactions. Since dentists are in a position to gain financially from their professional recommendations, they are at risk of having a conflict of interest, whether actual or perceived.

The patient is the beneficiary of the dentist's services. If the dentist is being compensated for professional services, then the dentist is also technically a "beneficiary" of his or her recommendations.

The issue is not whether there is a conflict of interest. The more appropriate question is, "How do we prevent this conflict from harming patients?"

Professional decision making may involve many factors. However, the level of financial gain to the dentist must never be a consideration in any of the dentist's professional recommendations. A patient's ability to pay for services may be a consideration in these recommendations. If the patient's relevant interests are always considered, the profession of dentistry can ethically exist within a business structure