



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ETHICS IN DENTISTRY

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#### ABSTRACT

Dental Ethics is an ever-growing collection of online courses, resources, and materials related to dental ethics a type of ethics resource clearing house. The purpose Dental Ethics is to heighten ethical and professional responsibility, promote ethical conduct and professionalism in dentistry, advance dialogue on ethical issues, and stimulate reflection on common ethical problems in dental practice. There are various aspects in dentistry to practice what is preached and maintain the ethics while treating patient.

## INTRODUCTION

Basically we have to understand what do you mean by the term "Ethics", why is it important, how codes of ethics function. We have to understand the difference between being legal and being ethical. Hence, it is important to understand the terms profession, professional and professionalism which would enlighten us to be more ethical. We have to understand the ethical issue like abuse of prescriptions by patients ; access of dental care; advertising; child abuse; confidentiality; delegation of duties; disclosure and misrepresentations; emergency care ; financial arrangements; informed consent; obligation to treat patients and refraining from treatment.

### Ethics Education

Ethics education is gradually being recognized by dentists as a solution for many of dentistry's professional challenges. It is important for every dental school to inculcate professional ethics into its curriculum. This entails moving beyond didactic lectures that incorporate formal definitions of ethical principles and codes, towards a more introspective orientation of professional life (Bertolami, 2004). As a result of media reports of fraud and excessive marketing practices, patients are now beginning to openly question the honesty and integrity of their dentists (Schwartz, 2004). Dental ethics education is an integral aspect in training dentists to uphold the standards of their profession.

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It is also essential to ensure continued patient confidence in dentistry. This education needs to start early, be reinforced continually throughout student's graduate training, and continue after they embark upon their professional careers. Although ethics education cannot guarantee that dentists will practice in an ethical manner, it can give students the tools to uphold dentistry's professional values. Dental Institution should have an ethical committee for the studies undertaken by an undergraduate and postgraduate students. Commercialism is based on pure profit. Professionalism is built on high ethical values such as altruism, patient centeredness, integrity, collegiality, truthfulness and compassion, to name but a few. In a professional model, what is good for the patient is good for the practice. Nowadays dentist market themselves through various social media regarding their treatment and about ethical practice (Barry Schwartz, 2015). Social inequities have been identified as a determinant in health status as well as on health outcomes on a global scale (Hobdell *et al.*, 2002). The Dental Council of India (DCI) is a statutory body constituted by an Act of Parliament through the Dentists Act (1948). Its main objectives are to regulate dental education, the dental profession and dental ethics in the country and to make recommendations to the Government of India regarding applications to start new dental colleges or higher courses and increase the number of seats (The Dental Council of India). It also maintains educational standards with respect to staff/student ratios, curricula, admission and examination.

**Declaration:** Every dentist who has been registered (either on Part A or Part B of the State Dentists Register) shall, within a period of thirty days from the date of commencement of these

regulations, and every dentist who gets himself registered after the commencement of these regulations shall, within a period of thirty days from such registration, make, before the Registrar of the State Dental Council, a declaration in the form set out for the purpose in the Schedule to these regulations and shall agree to have read.

### **Character of Dentist / Dental Surgeon**

In view of the important role of a Dentist/ Dental Surgeon as a health professional educated and trained in surgical and medical treatment of diseases of the Oral cavity, he shall:

Be mindful of the high character of his mission and the responsibilities he holds in the discharge of his duties as an independent health-care professional and shall always remember that care of the patient and treatment of the disease depends upon the skill and prompt attention shown by him and always remembering that his personal reputation, professional ability and fidelity remain his best recommendations;

Treat the welfare of the patients as paramount to all other considerations and shall conserve it to the utmost of his ability;

Be courteous, sympathetic, friendly and helpful to, and always ready to respond to, the call of his patients, and that under all conditions his behaviour towards his patients and the public shall be polite and dignified.

### **Maintaining good Clinical Practices**

The Principal objective of the Dental profession is to render service to humanity with full respect for the dignity of profession and man. Dental Surgeons should merit the confidence of patients entrusted to their care, rendering to each a full measure of service and devotion. They should try continuously to improve medical knowledge and skills and should make available to their patients and colleagues the benefits of their professional attainments. The Dentist/ Dental Surgeon should practice methods of healing founded on scientific basis and should not associate professionally with anyone who violates this principle. The honoured ideals of the dental profession imply that the responsibilities of the Dental Professionals extend not only to individuals but also to Society.

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Membership in Dental and Medical Associations and Societies: For the advancement of his/her profession, a Dental Surgeon should be encouraged to affiliate with associations and societies of dental, oral and allied medical professionals

and play a proactive role in the promotion of oral health in particular and health of an individual in general.

A Dentist/Dental Surgeon should enrich his professional knowledge by participating in professional meetings as part of Continuing Dental and Medical Education programs/Scientific Seminars/Workshops as stipulated by the regulations made by the statutory bodies from time to time and should register any mandatory requirements with the state registration bodies or any other body as stipulated.

### **Maintenance of Dental/Medical records:**

Every Dental surgeon shall maintain the relevant records pertaining to his out- patients and inpatients (wherever applicable). These records must be preserved for a minimum period of three years from the date of commencement of the treatment in a format determined by the Council or accepted as a standard mode of documentation.

If any request is made for medical or dental records either by the patients/authorized attendant or legal authorities involved, the same may be issued to the competent authority within 72 hours after having obtained a valid receipt for all documents. It is prudent to keep certified photocopies / carbon copies of such submissions.

A Registered Dental practitioner shall maintain a Register of Medical Certificates giving full details of certificates issued. When issuing a medical certificate he shall always enter the identification marks of the patient and keep a copy of the certificate. He shall not omit to record the signature and/ or thumb mark, address and at least one identification mark of the patient on the medical certificates or report. The medical certificate shall be prepared as in Appendix 2 of this document, Revised Dentists Code of Ethics Regulations, 2012.

Efforts shall be made to digitalize dental/ medical records for quick retrieval.

### **Display of Registration Numbers:**

Every Dental practitioner shall display the registration number accorded to him by the State Dental Council in his clinic and in all his prescriptions, certificates and money receipts given to his patients.

Dental Surgeons shall display as suffix to their names only recognized Dental degrees which are recognized by the Council or other qualifications such as certificates/diplomas and memberships/honours/ fellowships which are conferred by recognized Universities/ recognized bodies approved by the Council and obtained by convocation in person or in absentia. Any other qualifications such as medical degrees, doctorates, post-doctoral degrees or any degree that has bearing on the person's knowledge or exemplary qualification may be used as suffix in a manner that does not convey to the observer or patient a false impression regarding the practitioner's knowledge or ability as a dental professional. Abbreviations of memberships in association or organizations of professionals should not be used as abbreviations in a manner that is misleading to the public.

**Prescription of Drugs:** Every dental surgeon should take care to prescribe and administer drugs in a responsible manner and

ensure safe and rational use of drugs. He should as far as possible, prescribe drugs in a generic form.

### **Highest Quality Assurance in patient care**

Every Dental practitioner should ensure quality treatment that does not compromise the outcome of treatment. He must be vigilant about malpractice by other practitioners that may jeopardize the lives of others and which are likely to cause harm to the public. All practitioners should be aware of unethical practices and practices by unqualified persons. Dentists/ Dental Surgeons shall not employ in connection with their professional practice any attendant who is neither registered nor enlisted under the Dentists Act and shall not permit such persons to attend, treat or perform operations upon patients wherever professional discretion or skill is required.

### **Exposure of Unethical Conduct**

A Dental Surgeon should expose, without fear or favour, incompetent or corrupt, dishonest or unethical conduct on the part of members of the profession. It is the responsibility of the dental surgeon to report to the competent authorities' instances of quackery and any kind of abuse including doctor-patient sexual misconduct, misuse of fiduciary relationship, child abuse and other social evils that may come to their attention.

### **Payment of Professional Services**

The Dental Surgeon, engaged in the practice of his profession shall give priority to the interests of patients. The personal financial interests of a dental surgeon should not conflict with the medical interests of patients. A dental practitioner should announce his fees before rendering service and not after the operation or treatment is under way. Remuneration received for such services should be in the form and amount specifically announced to the patient at the time the service is rendered. It is unethical to enter into a contract of "no cure - no payment". Dental Surgeons rendering service on behalf of the State shall refrain from anticipating or accepting any consideration. While it is not mandatory to offer free consultations to fellow dental or medical professionals and their immediate family, it will be deemed a courtesy to offer free or subsidized consultations and treatment to them in situations where no significant expenses are incurred.

### **Observation of Statutes**

The Dental Surgeon shall observe the laws of the country in regulating the practice of his profession including the Dentists' Act 1948 and its amendments and shall also not assist others to evade such laws. He should be cooperative in observance and enforcement of sanitary laws and regulations in the interest of public health. He should observe the provisions of the State Acts like Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940; Pharmacy Act, 1948; Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances Act, 1985; Environmental Protection Act, 1986; Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954; Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998 and such other Acts, Rules, Regulations made by the Central/State Governments or local Administrative Bodies or any other relevant Act relating to the protection and promotion of public health.

### **Signing Professional Certificates, Reports and other Documents**

A Registered Dental Surgeon involved independently in the treatment of dental and oral surgical problems may be called upon to sign certificates, notifications, reports etc. He is bound to issue such certificates and to sign them. Documents relating to disability, injury in the oral and maxillofacial region and deaths occurring while under the care of such dental surgeons should be signed by them in their professional capacity for subsequent use in the courts or for administrative purposes etc. Such documents, among others, include the ones given at Appendix

Any registered dental surgeon who is shown to have signed or given under his name and authority any such certificate, notification, report or document of a similar character which is untrue, misleading or improper, is liable to have his name deleted from the Register.

### **Duties of dental practitioners to their patients**

#### **Obligations to Patients**

Though a Dental Surgeon is not bound to treat each and every person asking his services, he should attend emergencies reporting to the clinic and should be mindful of the high character of his/her mission and the responsibility he discharges in the course of his professional duties. The Dental Surgeon should see patients at their hour of appointment as far as possible unless he is unable to do so due to unforeseen delays. He should never forget that the health and the lives of those entrusted to his care depend on his skill and attention. A Dental Surgeon should endeavour to add to the comfort of the sick by making his visits at the hour indicated to the patients. A Dental surgeon advising a patient to seek service of another Dental Surgeon or physician is acceptable. However in the case of medical emergency a Dental Surgeon must institute standard care including resuscitation in case of cardiac episodes, for which all dental surgeons must be adequately trained in basic life support.

A Dental Surgeon can refuse treatment using his discretion but it should not be on the basis of any discrimination of colour, caste, religion, nationality or the presence of ailments such as HIV or other contagious diseases. However in keeping with the dictum of medical care, the dental surgeon must 'continue to treat' if he/she has accepted the patient for treatment. Treatment can be terminated on the wishes of the patient or with the resolution of the complaint for which the patient sought treatment. Treatment can also be terminated if the patient is in need of additional or expert care for which the Dental surgeon is not equipped to treat or if it falls outside the range of his expertise. In such instances, the patient should be referred to such specialists or higher centers where treatment is possible.

A Dental Practitioner having any incapacity detrimental to the patient or which can affect his performance vis-a-vis the patient is not permitted to practice his profession.

#### **Confidentiality**

Confidences concerning individual or domestic life entrusted by patients to a Dental Surgeon and defects in the disposition or character of patients observed during professionally

attending to a patient should never be revealed unless such a revelation is required by the laws of the State. Sometimes, however, a clinician must determine whether his duty to society requires him to employ knowledge, obtained through confidence as a health care provider to protect a healthy person against a communicable disease to which he is about to be exposed. In such instance, the Dental Surgeon should act as he would wish another to act toward one of his own family in like circumstances.

### Prognosis

The Dental Surgeon should neither exaggerate nor minimize the gravity of a patient's disease. He should ensure himself that the patient, his relatives or his responsible friends have such knowledge of the patient's condition as will serve the best interests of the patient and the family.

### The Patient must not be neglected

A Dental surgeon is free to choose whom he will serve. He should, however, respond to any request for his assistance in an emergency. Once having undertaken a case, the Dental Surgeon should not neglect the patient, nor should he withdraw from the case without giving adequate notice to the patient and his family. He shall not willfully commit an act of negligence that may deprive his patient or patients from necessary Dental/Medical care.

### Duties of dental surgeons and specialists in consultations

#### Consultation Etiquettes

A Dental Surgeon should ordinarily be able to deal with all common diseases of the Oral cavity by virtue of his qualification and training. However, if the patient requires expert care of a specialist, appropriate references to Dental or Medical specialists may be made according to the nature of the problem. It is the duty of a specialist to refer the patient back to the patient's original dentist after the treatment for which the referral was made. While the specialist can collect his or her fees it would be unethical to pay commissions or any kind of gratuity to the referring dental surgeon.

A Dental Surgeon shall not receive from the radiologist, laboratory or dispensing chemist any kind of commission in the form of money, gifts or gratuity for referrals. All referrals for investigation should be judicious, justifiable and done in the best interests of the patient to arrive at a diagnosis.

### Consultation for Patient's Benefit

In every consultation, the benefit to the patient is of foremost importance. All Dental Surgeons engaged in the case should be frank with the patient and his attendants.

### Punctuality in Consultation

Punctuality for consultations should be observed by a Dental Surgeon except in the case of unavoidable professional delays which are justifiable.

### Opinions and Disclosure

All statements to the patient or his representatives made by any Consulting Healthcare Professional and/or the paramedical staff (nurses, etc.,) should take place in the presence of the Dental Surgeon, except as otherwise agreed. The disclosure of the opinion to the patient or his relatives or friends.

### Conclusion

The best practices identified are more towards goals achieved for an ethical practice as it is recognized that, in a world in which there are enormous variations in economic, environmental, social, and cultural features, a single uniform set of practices is impracticable. The central core value identified is the realization by students, and faculty/teaching staff of the quest of life-long learning against a background of the social and ethical responsibilities of health professionals.

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