




## Dentists' relationship with patients and colleagues




## Lecture outline

- ▶ Basic principles of professional relationships
  - ▶ Dentist's relationship with patients
  - ▶ Dentist's relationship with other professionals
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## Basic principles of professional relationships



## The principles of medical ethics

- ▶ Relationship with patients and colleagues is based on the principles of medical ethics.
  - ▶ Principles can overlap each other as well as compete with each other for priority.
  - ▶ More than one principle can justify a given element.
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## The principles of ethics

- ▶ Patient autonomy 'self-governance'.
- ▶ Nonmaleficence 'do no harm'.
- ▶ Beneficence 'do good'.
- ▶ Justice 'fairness'.
- ▶ Veracity 'truthfulness'.



## Dentist's relationship with patients



### Patient autonomy 'self-governance'

- ▶ Treat the patients according to their desires, within the bounds of accepted treatment.
- ▶ Protect the patient's confidentiality.
- ▶ Inform the patient of the proposed treatment, and any reasonable alternatives.



### Patient autonomy 'self-governance'

#### ▶ Choice of Treatment

- Discuss with the patient treatment recommendations to allow him/her to make an informed choice.
- Benefits.
- Prognosis.
- Risks.
- Reasonable alternatives.
- Costs.



## Patient autonomy 'self-governance'

### ► Confidentiality

- Adequate records of medical and dental history, clinical findings, diagnosis and treatment of each patient need to be established and maintained.
- Patient information acquired shall be kept in strict confidence except as required by law.



## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

- Protect the patient from harm.
- Achieved by keeping knowledge and skills current, and knowing one's own limitations.



## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

### ► Education

- All dentists have the obligation of keeping their knowledge and skills current.
- Treatment must be provided in accordance with currently accepted professional standards.



## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

### ► Consultation and Referral

- Provide treatment only when qualified by training or experience; otherwise a consultation and/or referral to an appropriate practitioner is warranted.

## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

### ▶ Patient Abandonment

- ▶ Do not discontinue treatment without giving the patient adequate notice and the opportunity to obtain the services of another dentist.
- ▶ Care should be taken that the patient's oral health is not jeopardized in the process.



## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

### ▶ Patient Records

- A dentist has the ethical obligation on request of either the patient or the patient's new dentist to hand in dental records or copies of them.
- This obligation exists whether or not the patient's account is paid in full.



## Nonmaleficence ("do no harm")

### ▶ Personal Relationships with Patients

- ▶ Avoid interpersonal relationships that could impair professional judgment or risk the possibility of exploiting the confidence of the patient.



## Beneficence 'Do good'

- ▶ Professionals have a moral duty to act for the benefit of others.
- ▶ The dentist has a duty to promote the patient's welfare.



## Beneficence 'Do good'

### ▶ Abuse and Neglect

- It is important to become familiar with the signs of abuse and neglect and to report suspected cases to the proper authorities.

## Beneficence 'Do good'

### ▶ Community Service

- Use your skills, knowledge and experience for the improvement of the dental health of the public.



## Responsibilities to Patients

### ▶ Emergency Service

- Dentists have an obligation to consult and to provide treatment in a dental emergency.
- Upon completion of treatment, the dentist is obliged to return the patient to his/her regular dentist.



## Justice 'Fairness'

- ▶ Professionals have a duty to be fair in their dealings with patients, colleagues and society, and deliver health care without prejudice.



## Justice 'Fairness'

### ▶ Patient Selection

- Do not refuse to accept patients into your practice or deny dental service to patients because of the patient's race, creed, color, sex or national origin.
- You have the right to refuse to accept an individual as a patient on the basis of personal conflict or time constraint.

## Justice 'Fairness'

### ▶ Patients with Bloodborne Pathogens

- A dentist has the general obligation to provide care to those in need.
- A decision not to provide treatment to an individual because the individual is infected with HIV, Hepatitis B Virus, Hepatitis C Virus or another bloodborne pathogen, based solely on that fact, is unethical.

## Justice 'Fairness'

### ▶ Justifiable Criticism

- Patients should be informed of their present oral health status without degrading comment about prior services.
- Comments made should be truthful, informed and justifiable.



## Veracity 'Truthfulness'

- ▶ Professionals have a duty to be honest and trustworthy in their dealings with people.
- ▶ Respect the position of trust inherent in the dentist-patient relationship.



## Veracity 'Truthfulness'

### ▶ Unnecessary Services

- A dentist who recommends and performs unnecessary dental services or procedures is engaged in unethical conduct.
- E.g: removal of amalgam restorations from the non-allergic patient for the alleged purpose of removing toxic substances from the body.



## Veracity 'Truthfulness'

### ▶ Representation of Care

- Do not represent the care being rendered to their patients in a false or misleading manner.



## Veracity 'Truthfulness'

### ▶ Guarantee

- A dentist must, neither by statement nor implication, warrant or guarantee the success of operations, appliances or treatment.
- A dentist has the responsibility to provide a high standard of care and accept responsibility for treatment rendered.



## Veracity 'Truthfulness'

### ▶ Treatment Dates

- A dentist who submits a claim form to a third party reporting incorrect treatment dates for the purpose of assisting a patient in obtaining benefits under a dental plan, is engaged in making an unethical, false or misleading representation to such third party.



## Veracity ‘Truthfulness’

### › Overbilling

- It is unethical for a dentist to increase a fee to a patient solely because the patient is covered under a dental benefits plan.



## Veracity ‘Truthfulness’

### › Professional Announcement

- Do not misrepresent training and competence in any way that would be false or misleading.
- Respect and support the public's right to a free choice of dentist.
- Do not participate in any arrangement which might limit or interfere with a person's freedom to choose a dentist.
- Act in a manner which will enhance the prestige and reputation of the profession.



## Dentist’s relationship with other professionals



## Consultations and referrals

- › Dentists should refer for advice and/or treatment any patient requiring a level of competence beyond that held.
- › Referral letters should be courteous & written in such a way to decrease the possibility of confusion.
- › The specialists or consulting dentists upon completion of their care shall return the patient to the referring dentist.





## Consultations and referrals

- ▶ A dentist may not enter into an arrangement whereby the referral of patients results in a fee paid, a commission, a discount or other consideration to the dentist or another party (fee-splitting).



## Judgments in Peer Relations

- ▶ Dentists are encouraged to consult with a previous dentist, concerning treatment rendered.
- ▶ A dentist should not make improper comments of the procedures or qualifications of a colleague to a patient or the public.
- ▶ Report instances of gross or continual faulty treatment by other dentists to the appropriate reviewing agency.



## Conflict resolution

- ▶ Conflicts should be resolved as informally as possible.
- ▶ The opinions of all those directly involved should be given respectful consideration.
- ▶ The informed choice of the patient regarding treatment should be the primary consideration.
- ▶ If the dispute is about which options the patient should be offered, a broader rather than a narrower range of options is usually preferable.
- ▶ If agreement or compromise cannot be reached, the decision of the person with the right or responsibility for making the decision should be accepted.
- ▶ If it is unclear or disputed who has the right or responsibility to make the decision, mediation should be sought.



## Case study 1

- ▶ Dr. P has been in practice for 32 years. His older patients appreciate his devoted service and are generally quite happy to let him decide what treatment they will have. Some of his younger patients, on the other hand, resent what they consider to be his paternalistic approach and the lack of information about treatment options. When Carole J, a 28-year-old accountant, asks Dr. P for a referral to an orthodontist to correct a mild overbite, Dr. P refuses because it is his professional opinion that the treatment is unnecessary. He is willing to lose a patient rather than compromise with his principle that dentists should only provide beneficial treatments to patients. He will neither mention nor refer patients for treatments that he considers unnecessary or harmful.



## Case Study 1

- ▶ Patients have the right to make decisions about their health care.
- ▶ If for professional or conscience reasons a dentist refuses to provide a particular service, it does not automatically follow that he or she should not refer the patient to another dentist.
- ▶ If genuinely concerned about the harmful consequences of orthodontic treatment for this patient, rather than bluntly refusing to refer he should begin by explaining his concerns.
- ▶ The dentist at the very least should assist the patient in finding another dentist who would consider her request.
- ▶ A dentist should not be too certain that his or her outlook is the only right one, or even the best one.

## Case study 2

- ▶ Dr. C, a newly qualified endodontist, has just taken over the practice of the only endodontist in a medium-sized community. The four general practice dentists in the community are relieved that they can continue their referrals without interruption. During his first three months in the community, Dr. C is concerned that a significant number of the patients referred by one of the general practice dentists show evidence of substandard treatment. As a newcomer, Dr. C is reluctant to criticise the referring dentist personally or to report him to higher authorities. However, she feels that she must do something to improve the situation

## Case study 2

- ▶ Dr. C has an ethical duty not to ignore this problem
- ▶ She might try to have a discussion with the referring dentist to communicate her concerns and see whether he might voluntarily take corrective measures.
- ▶ If this does not succeed, she could raise the issue with the other dentists in the community to see whether they share her misgivings and seek their advice on further action.
- ▶ If none of these initiatives has the desired effect, Dr C can approach the appropriate dentist licensing body and ask it to investigate.
- ▶ Dr. C also has to decide whether she should inform the patients about their substandard treatment. Patients should be informed of their present oral health status without disparaging statements about prior services.

