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# STANDARDS FOR **DENTAL PROFESSIONALS**



GENERAL DENTAL COUNCIL  
**STANDARDS** GUIDANCE

GDC | protecting patients,  
regulating the dental team

**“We aim to** protect patients  
promote confidence in dental  
professionals  
be at the forefront of healthcare  
regulation

**We** register qualified professionals  
set standards of dental practice and  
conduct  
assure the quality of dental education  
ensure professionals keep  
up-to-date  
help patients with complaints about a  
dental professional  
work to strengthen patient  
protection”

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet sets out the principles you should follow as a dental professional. It supports all other guidance we issue.

The principles should influence all areas and stages of your professional education and practice. You should apply the principles appropriately to any work you are involved in as a dental professional, whether or not you routinely treat patients.

Clinical standards in dentistry are constantly developing. We do not issue clinical guidelines or statements on clinical standards. However, we do issue a policy statement on general anaesthesia and conscious sedation (which is attached as the annex to this booklet).

As a dental professional, you are responsible for making sure you do the following.

- Be familiar with and understand:
  - current standards which affect your work;
  - relevant guidelines issued by organisations other than us; and
  - available sources of evidence that support current standards.
- Apply your up-to-date knowledge and skills ethically.

## **THE PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE IN DENTISTRY**

As a dental professional, you are responsible for doing the following.

- 1 Putting patients' interests first and acting to protect them.
- 2 Respecting patients' dignity and choices.
- 3 Protecting the confidentiality of patients' information.
- 4 Co-operating with other members of the dental team and other healthcare colleagues in the interests of patients.
- 5 Maintaining your professional knowledge and competence.
- 6 Being trustworthy.

## APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES

It is your responsibility to apply these principles to your daily work, using your judgement in the light of the principles.

You have a professional responsibility to be prepared to justify your actions, and we may ask you to do so. You must be willing and able to show that:

- you are aware of this booklet; and
- you have followed the principles it explains.

If you cannot give a satisfactory account of your behaviour or practice in line with the principles explained in this booklet, your registration will be at risk.

**1 Put patients' interests first and act to protect them**

- 1.1** Put patients' interests before your own or those of any colleague, organisation or business.
- 1.2** Follow these principles when handling questions and complaints from patients and in all other aspects of non-clinical professional service.
- 1.3** Work within your knowledge, professional competence and physical abilities. Refer patients for a second opinion and for further advice when it is necessary, or if the patient asks. Refer patients for further treatment when it is necessary to do so.
- 1.4** Make and keep accurate and complete patient records, including a medical history, at the time you treat them. Make sure that patients have easy access to their records.
- 1.5** Give patients who make a complaint about the care or treatment they have received a helpful response at the appropriate time. Respect the patient's right to complain. Make sure that there is an effective complaints procedure where you work and follow it at all times. Co-operate with any formal inquiry into the treatment of a patient.
- 1.6** Make sure your patients are able to claim any compensation they may be entitled to by making sure you are protected against claims at all times, including past periods of practice.
- 1.7** If you believe that patients might be at risk because of your health, behaviour or professional performance, or that of a colleague, or because of any aspect of the clinical environment, you should take action. You can get advice from appropriate colleagues, a professional organisation or your defence organisation. If at any time you are not sure how to continue, contact us.

- 1.8** Find out about local procedures for child protection. Make sure you follow these procedures if you suspect that a child might be at risk because of abuse or neglect.
- 1.9** Never ask for, nor accept, any payment, gift or hospitality, or make or accept any referral, which may affect or appear to affect your professional judgement.
- 1.10** Do not make any claims which could mislead patients.

## **2 Respect patients' dignity and choices**

- 2.1** Treat patients politely and with respect, in recognition of their dignity and rights as individuals.
- 2.2** Recognise and promote patients' responsibility for making decisions about their bodies, their priorities and their care, making sure you do not take any steps without patients' consent (permission). Follow our guidance 'Principles of patient consent'.
- 2.3** Treat patients fairly and in line with the law. Promote equal opportunities for all patients. Do not discriminate against patients or groups of patients because of their sex, age, race, ethnic origin, nationality, special needs or disability, sexuality, health, lifestyle, beliefs or any other irrelevant consideration.
- 2.4** Listen to patients and give them the information they need, in a way they can use, so that they can make decisions. This will include:
- communicating effectively with patients;
  - explaining options (including risks and benefits); and
  - giving full information on proposed treatment and possible costs.
- 2.5** Maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients. Do not abuse those relationships.

**3 Protect the confidentiality of patients' information**

- 3.1** Treat information about patients as confidential and only use it for the purposes for which it is given.
- 3.2** Prevent information from being accidentally revealed and prevent unauthorised access by keeping information secure at all times.
- 3.3** In exceptional circumstances, it may be justified to make confidential patient information known without consent if it is in the public interest or the patient's interest. You should get appropriate advice before revealing information on this basis. Follow our guidance 'Principles of patient confidentiality'.

**4 Co-operate with other members of the dental team and other healthcare colleagues in the interests of patients**

- 4.1** Co-operate with other team members and colleagues and respect their role in caring for patients.
- 4.2** Treat all team members and other colleagues fairly and in line with the law. Do not discriminate against them.
- 4.3** Communicate effectively and share your knowledge and skills with other team members and colleagues as necessary in the interests of patients. In all dealings with other team members and colleagues, make the interests of patients your first priority. Follow our guidance 'Principles of dental team working'.



**5 Maintain your professional knowledge and competence**

- 5.1** Recognise that your qualification for registration was the first stage in your professional education. Develop and update your knowledge and skills throughout your working life.
- 5.2** Continuously review your knowledge, skills and professional performance. Reflect on them, and identify and understand your limits as well as your strengths.
- 5.3** Find out about current best practice in the fields in which you work. Provide a good standard of care based on available up-to-date evidence and reliable guidance.
- 5.4** Find out about laws and regulations which affect your work, premises, equipment and business, and follow them.

**6 Be trustworthy**

- 6.1** Justify the trust that your patients, the public and your colleagues have in you by always acting honestly and fairly.
- 6.2** Apply these principles to clinical and professional relationships, and any business or educational activities you are involved in.
- 6.3** Maintain appropriate standards of personal behaviour in all walks of life so that patients have confidence in you and the public have confidence in the dental profession.

## ANNEX

### **Statement on providing dental treatment under general anaesthesia and conscious sedation**

- Dental treatment under general anaesthesia should:
  - only be carried out when it is judged to be the most clinically appropriate method of anaesthesia; and
  - only take place in a hospital setting (see the note opposite) that has critical-care facilities.
  
- General anaesthesia may only be given by someone who is:
  - on the specialist register of the General Medical Council as an anaesthetist;
  - a trainee working under supervision as part of a Royal College of Anaesthetists' approved training programme; or
  - a non-consultant career-grade anaesthetist with an NHS appointment under the supervision of a named consultant anaesthetist, who must be a member of the same NHS anaesthetic department where the non-consultant career-grade anaesthetist is employed.
  
- The anaesthetist should be supported by someone who is specifically trained and experienced in the necessary skills to help monitor the patient's condition and to help in any emergency.
  
- We support the recommendations set out in the Department of Health (England) publication 'A Conscious Decision – a review of the use of general anaesthesia and conscious sedation in primary dental care' (July 2000) and associated letters of advice from Chief Dental Officers in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

- We also support the guidance set out in 'Conscious Sedation in the provision of dental care' (November 2003), a Standing Dental Advisory Committee report of an expert group on sedation for dentistry, which the Department of Health asked for. We expect dental professionals to follow this guidance.

The publication 'A Conscious Decision' defines 'Hospital setting' as 'any institution for the reception and treatment of persons suffering illness or any injury or disability requiring medical or dental treatment, which has critical care facilities on the same site and includes clinics and outpatient departments maintained in connection with any such institution'

## GUIDANCE THAT SUPPORTS THIS BOOKLET

As well as this booklet, we have produced supporting guidance booklets on the following.

- Principles of Patient Consent (published May 2005)
- Principles of Patient Confidentiality (published May 2005)
- Principles of Dental Team Working (published January 2006)
- Principles of Complaints Handling (published May 2006)
- Principles of Raising Concerns (published May 2006)

You can download these booklets, and more copies of this booklet, from our website, or you can phone or e-mail us for copies using the contact details below.

### Other sources of advice

You can find a list of further sources of information and advice for dental professionals and the public on our website at **[www.gdc-uk.org](http://www.gdc-uk.org)** Or, you can phone us for a copy of the list on **020 7887 3800** or e-mail us at **[standards@gdc-uk.org](mailto:standards@gdc-uk.org)**

20 May 2005

## CONTACT US

To check whether somebody is a registered dentist or registered dental care professional, or on the Specialist Lists: [registration@gdc-uk.org](mailto:registration@gdc-uk.org)  
Or check online at [www.gdc-uk.org](http://www.gdc-uk.org)

For more information about how we quality-assure dental education: [qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org](mailto:qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org)

For more information on making a complaint about a dental professional: [complaints@gdc-uk.org](mailto:complaints@gdc-uk.org)

To find out more about our standards of practice and behaviour: [standards@gdc-uk.org](mailto:standards@gdc-uk.org)

To find out more about how we're working to improve patient protection through our modernisation programme: [communications@gdc-uk.org](mailto:communications@gdc-uk.org)

If you would like a large print or audio version of this leaflet, please contact [communications@gdc-uk.org](mailto:communications@gdc-uk.org)

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