

EDITORIAL

ETHICS IN DENTISTRY- PROFESSION OR BUSINESS

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Ethics has been defined as “the science of moral philosophy.” It is in school that we may learn the very basic difference between a profession and a business. The people with whom we are to come in contact are looked upon entirely differently. They make this demand upon us by confiding in us. In a profession there is something, whether tangible or intangible, that places service above material gain. In the profession the human element overrides. Personal services are rendered to supply personal needs, and do not become a matter of selling something as in business. Dental and associated systemic diseases are treated or prevented. Such services are not objects to be transmitted. Such services do not present charges, nor are they listed under various prices as commodities. Honest thinking individuals realize that they could not possibly pay the price for such services. Instead, fees are presented to that individual for the services rendered. In making a fee, one must consider such things as the materials used, cost of production of the restoration (if required), the time element, the benefit that the patient derives from one’s services, and the cost of your training for such work. Professional service implies much more than what we actually think.

When one thinks of material gain, he immediately thinks of trade. On the other hand, when professional service is thought of, sacrifice runs hand in hand with it. Patients place all of their confidence within the hands of the professional man, who in turn should act as a protector to them. As soon as profit motives dominate a calling, it ceases to be a profession. Professions, to it large extent, are self-governed and self disciplined, it is left to us of the future to keep them so by ethical practices. The basic principles of Dental ethics are:

- Be honest and impartial in serving patients, the public, the organization and the profession.
- Strive to increase personal competence and the esteem in which the profession is held.
- Use knowledge and skill to improve the health and well-being of patients and the public.
- Respect the dignity, professional status of, and professional relationships with their fellow colleagues, staff and other health care providers.

As Clove dental professionals we have various ethical responsibilities which should be practiced as a team.

- Fairness: A dental professional shall not exclude, as patients, members of society on the basis of discrimination with respect to factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, spiritual beliefs, social or marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, health status, lifestyle or the physical attributes of the patient.
- Dignity: Dental professional should value and advocate the dignity and selfrespect of patients.
- Life, Health and Well-Being: The primary concern is the life, general health and well-being of the patient. It is the responsibility of the dental professional to provide patients with the highest quality of care in a timely manner.
- Patient Autonomy: The patient has the right to choose, on the basis of adequate information, from alternative treatment plans that meet professional standards of care. The treatment plan may or may not be the preference of the professional but to provide information in an effort to help the patient choose a treatment plan.
- Appropriate and Pain-free Oral Function: It is the responsibility of the professional to plan treatments that deal with the specific nature of dental health for each individual patient with regards to variables such as the patient’s age, general health, underlying anatomy, and compliance with oral hygiene.
- Accountability: Dental professional should conduct themselves with honesty and integrity.
- Confidentiality: Patient information acquired in the practice of dentistry shall be kept in strict confidence, except as required by law.
- Records: A dental professional must maintain accurate and comprehensive records of medical and dental histories, clinical findings, diagnoses, treatment plans, and treatments of each patient. Such records or reports of clinical information must be released to the patient, or to whomever the patient directs, when requested by the patient. When there is a transfer of patient care to another dentist, the primary dentist must handover the records to the new practitioner.
- Originality of Records: The professional must not falsify written or electronic documents like patient

records in any manner such as changing previous entries, making false entries, or forging signatures, with the intent to defraud, injure or deceive another.

- **Mutual Respect:** The profession should be viewed as a partnership of equals. All professionals are colleagues with equal moral status and obligation in the decision making process of the activities of the profession and the organization. A dental professional should not make disparaging comments about fellow colleagues or their work, to a patient or the public.
- **Integrity and Loyalty:** When a professional suspect unethical conduct or incompetent or unsafe care and have reasonable grounds for concern about the behavior of colleagues in this regard, or about the safety of conditions in the clinic, they should address the issue with the offending professional. If this fails to resolve the problem, the dental professional is obligated to report the issue to the organization.

The dental profession holds a special position of trust within society. As a consequence, society affords the dental profession certain privileges that are not available to members of the public-at-large. In return, the dental profession makes a commitment to society that its members will adhere to high ethical standards of conduct. The public grants a health care profession the privilege of self-regulation. Implicit in the concept of self-regulation is the obligation of the profession to have and abide by a written code of conduct that provides guidance to its members and future members.



About the author:

Lt Gen Dr Vimal Arora, PVSM AVSM VSM & Bar; OSRE (Oman) is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Dental Health & Research. He is presently working as the Chief Clinical Officer of Clove Dental, the Largest Dental Chain of India. He manages more than 350 clinics and 900 dentists for delivery of dental treatment at all echelons in 27 cities across the country. Gen Vimal has a 40 years history of working in the Army Dental Corps. He superannuated as the Director General of Dental Services & Colonel Commandant of Dental Corps and was appointed the Honorary Dental Surgeon to the President of India. He was also a Member of the Dental Council of India. He is the highest awarded Army Dentist, four times recipient of the Presidential Award in India and once from Sultan of Oman. He is the author of several research papers in highly acclaimed journals and also a celebrated writer for his books on dentistry.