

Council Statement

Principles of Ethical Conduct for Oral Health Practitioners

Approved by DCNZ October 2006

Introduction

The Dental Council of New Zealand is the self-regulatory body for the oral health professions and is constituted under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (HPCAA) 2003. The principle purpose of the Dental Council is to protect the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring that oral health practitioners are registered, fit and competent to practise their professions.

One of the statutory functions assigned to the Dental Council under the HPCAA is to set the standards of ethical conduct to be observed by oral health practitioners. Ethical standards are principles of professional conduct to which health practitioners must aspire to fulfil their duties to the patients and to the public. They guide attitude and behaviour and as such they extend beyond professional skills and technical competence. Ethical standards, moreover, may and often do exceed legal obligations.

The following statement sets out the ethical principles you should follow as an oral health practitioner. The principles also provide a guide for the public to determine reasonable expectations of oral health practitioners. These principles are of a broad, overarching nature. The application of these principles in terms of the specific obligations of registered oral health providers are to be elaborated by the relevant professional associations in the form of detailed codes of ethical standards, for example the NZDA Code of Ethics. The professional associations representing dental therapy, dental hygiene and dental technology are currently in the process of developing codes of ethical standards for their respective professions.

The principles should also be read in conjunction with other relevant legislation, standards, policies and procedures defining professional practice and conduct. The most important of these are set out at the end of this document.

Principles of Ethical Conduct

Principle 1: Provide good care

Put patients' interests first and to provide them with a good standard of oral health care.

Principle Two: Respect patients' dignity and choices

Provide oral health care in a manner that respects patients' dignity and choices

Principle Three: Cooperate with other members of the dental team

Cooperate with other dental team members and other colleagues and respect their role in caring for patients

Principle 4: Uphold trust and professional integrity

Uphold the integrity of your profession and justify the trust placed in you by your patients, colleagues and the public

Resources

Professional Standards

- NZDA Code of Ethics
- NZDA/DCNZ Joint Dentists' Code of Practice: Informed Consent
- DCNZ Code of Practice: Informed Consent (for dental therapists, dental hygienists and auxiliaries and dental technicians/clinical dental technicians)
- NZDA/DCNZ Joint Dentists' Code of Practice: Sexual Boundaries in the Dentist - Patient Relationship
- NZDA/DCNZ/NZDHA Joint Code of Practice: Working Relationship Between Dental Hygienists And Dentists
- NZDA/DCNZ Joint Code of Practice: The Practice of Dental Technology and Clinical Dental Technology and the Working Relationship within the Practice of Dentistry
- Dental Council Statement: The Professional Relationships Associated with the Practice of Dental Therapy
- NZDA Code of Practice: Complaints and Criticism
- NZDA Practice Guideline for After-Hours Emergencies (Dental treatment outside normal hours), October 2000
- NZDA Practice Guidelines for Child Protection
- NZDA Code of Practice: Referrals of Patients

Legislation and regulations

Practitioners should maintain a working knowledge of the responsibility placed upon their professional activities by current laws and regulations. Those which directly or indirectly affect the professional practice of oral health practitioners include the following:

- Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003
- Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers Rights 1994
- Medicines Act 1981
- Misuse of Drugs Act 1985
- Human Rights Act 1993
- Privacy Act 1993 and Health Information Privacy Code 1994
- Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992
- Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994
- Consumer Guarantees Act 1993
- Fair Trading Act 1986

- Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 [especially sections 15 and 16]

Useful websites

- Dental Council of New Zealand www.dcnz.org.nz
- New Zealand Dental Hygienists Association www.nzdha.co.nz
- Human Rights Commission www.hrc.co.nz
- Health and Disability Commission www.hdc.org.nz
- Office of the Privacy Commissioner www.privacy.org.nz
- New Zealand Dental Association www.nzda.org.nz
- New Zealand Dental Therapists Association www.nzdta.co.nz
- New Zealand Institute of Dental Technologists www.nzidt.org.nz