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# PRINCIPLES OF **DENTAL TEAM WORKING**



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

Good dental care is delivered by a dental team. The quality of teamwork is closely linked to the quality of care the team provides. All members of the dental team contribute to the patient's experience of dental treatment, and all have a role to play in making the best possible contribution to patient care.

This guidance is about how the dental team can best work together in the interests of patients. It supports our main standards guidance 'Standards for dental professionals', and applies to all the members of the dental team who we register. The members of the dental team who have to be registered with us are:

- clinical dental technicians;
- dental hygienists;
- dental nurses;
- dental technicians;
- dental therapists;
- dentists; and
- orthodontic therapists.

'Standards for dental professionals' sets out the six main principles which you should apply to your work as a dental professional. It is your responsibility to apply these principles to your daily work, using your judgement in the light of the principles.

The guidance says:

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

- Co-operate with other team members and colleagues, and respect their role in caring for patients.
- Treat all team members and other colleagues fairly and in line with the law. Do not discriminate against them.
- 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.

## **1 The dental team**

- 1.1** The dental team is the group of people who together provide care for a patient. Teamwork means working together to provide good-quality dental care.
- 1.2** Dental teams can take many different forms, depending on the needs of the patient. The dental team is not just limited to dental professionals working together in the same practice. For example:
- Most dental technicians work in a laboratory and so will not work in the same place as other team members.
  - You may have your own practice, but you still work as part of a wider dental team. An example would be when you refer a patient to another dental professional.
- 1.3** You may also be part of a wider healthcare team, with members outside your professional group. For example, you may work in a community dental service setting or in a hospital with other healthcare professionals.

## **2 How the team should work together**

- 2.1** Patients should be seen by a dentist before being treated by other members of the dental team. The only current exception to this is edentulous patients (patients with no teeth), who may be seen by a clinical dental technician without seeing a dentist first, for the supply and maintenance of full dentures only.
- 2.2** We may approve other cases if we are satisfied that Dental Care Professionals (DCPs) have received the necessary training to be able to see patients without them seeing a dentist first.

**2.3** Patients should have a full mouth assessment by a dentist. The dentist should then give the patient an outline treatment plan or full treatment plan if necessary, depending on the patient's needs.

**2.4** The treatment plan could be as simple as a statement that the patient has good oral health, and needs no more than routine oral care for the next three years, or a detailed plan for complex treatment and reassessment in three months.

**2.5** The treatment plan (whether an outline plan or full treatment plan) should include:

- recall intervals, depending on the patient's clinical needs;
- a date for a full mouth reassessment by a dentist; and
- a referral if necessary.

(The reassessment date is the date when the patient must return to be seen by a dentist for a full-mouth examination and treatment plan.)

(The recall interval is how often the patient should return to be seen by a member of the dental team.)

**2.6** The recalls might not be recalls to the dentist, and the dentist can ask the DCP to set the intervals.

**2.7** Until the date of the full-mouth reassessment by a dentist, the patient may take the treatment plan to any appropriate registered dental professional who can, within the overall limits of the plan and the limits of their competence, treat the patient (and make any further appropriate referrals) until that date.

### **3 Your individual responsibilities within the team**

- 3.1** All members of the dental team who have to register with us are individually responsible and accountable for their own actions and for the treatment or processes which they carry out. This includes your responsibility for co-operating with other team members in the best interests of patients.
- 3.2** As a registered dental professional, you are also responsible for the actions of any member of the team you lead or manage who delivers care to the patient but who does not have to register with us (for example, receptionists and practice managers).
- 3.3** Make sure that unregistered members of the dental team working alongside you or under your supervision are familiar with 'Standards for dental professionals' and its supporting guidance, and follow it.

#### **Carrying out treatment**

- 3.4** Only carry out a task or a type of treatment if you are sure that you have been trained and are competent to do it.
- 3.5** Only ask another member of the team to carry out a task or a type of treatment if you are confident that they have been trained and are competent to do it.  
  
(Our documents 'Developing the Dental Team' and 'The First Five Years' set out the competencies expected of newly qualified DCPs in each group and newly qualified dentists.)
- 3.6** Only make decisions about a patient's treatment and care when you are confident that you have had the necessary training and are competent to make the decision.

**3.7** When treating patients, make sure there is someone else – preferably a registered team member – present in the room, who is trained to deal with medical emergencies.

**3.8** There may be circumstances in which it is not possible for a trained person to be present – for example, if you are treating a patient in an out-of-hours emergency or on a home visit. If this is the case, you are responsible for assessing the possible risk to the patient of continuing with treatment in the absence of a trained person.

### **Raising concerns**

**3.9** As a team member, you have a responsibility to raise any concern you have that patients might be at risk because of:

- your own health, behaviour or professional performance;
- the health, behaviour or professional performance of an employer or colleague within the team;
- any aspect of the clinical environment; or
- any action you have been asked to carry out that you believe conflicts with your main duty to put patients' interests first and act to protect them.

**3.10** You have a responsibility to do this whether or not you are in position to control or influence the organisation within which you work.

**3.11** A supportive team will encourage its members to bring any concerns or difficulties they have to the team at an early stage, where they can often be sorted out.

**3.12** Make sure you familiarise yourself with, and follow, our guidance 'Principles of raising concerns'.

## 4 Working effectively as a team

### Communicating with patients

- 4.1 Make sure patients know who makes up the team providing their care.
- 4.2 Give patients a clear picture of the important relationships within that team. This includes telling patients who has overall responsibility for their treatment.
- 4.3 When a patient's care is being delivered by several members of a team, make sure that a clear written treatment plan is kept, and that clinical records are maintained and updated, and shared with everyone involved.
- 4.4 Make sure that you explain to patients the circumstances in which you might share information about them with others involved in their healthcare. Follow our guidance 'Principles of patient confidentiality'.
- 4.5 You must get valid consent (permission) before starting treatment or physical investigation, or providing personal care. Follow our guidance 'Principles of patient consent'.
- 4.6 Make sure patients know how to make a complaint. Follow our guidance 'Principles of complaints handling.'

### Referrals

- 4.7 If you ask a colleague to provide treatment, a dental appliance or clinical advice for a patient, make sure that your request is clear and that you give your colleague all the appropriate information.
- 4.8 If a colleague asks you to provide treatment, a dental appliance or clinical advice for a patient, be sure that you are clear about what you are being asked to do.



- 4.9** If you do not feel that what you have been asked to do is appropriate, discuss this with the colleague who has made the request and come to an agreement before continuing.
- 4.10** If you are a DCP, make sure you understand the circumstances in which you should refer the patient to a dentist and that there is a procedure for doing this. Make this procedure clear to the patient. You have a responsibility to explain to the patient the importance of seeing a dentist regularly.
- 4.11** Make sure that the process of referral is clearly recorded.

## 5 Leading a team

- 5.1** A good team will have:
- good leadership;
  - clear, shared aims, and work together to achieve them; and
  - different roles and responsibilities, and understand those roles and responsibilities.
- 5.2** If you are responsible for leading a team, make sure that:
- you employ suitably trained and, where appropriate, qualified and registered staff (you can check qualification and registration details with us); and
  - anyone within the team who makes dental appliances or helps with a clinical procedure is registered with us, or in training for a qualification registerable with us.
- 5.3** Nurses registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council are allowed by law to assist in clinical procedures related to maxillofacial surgery.

## Responsibilities to your team

**5.4** If you employ, manage or lead a team, you should make sure that:

- all your team members have access to the training they need and the opportunity to take part in continuing professional development;
- you do not take advantage of your position if another member of the team says that they do not feel that they should carry out a particular task because they are not trained or competent to do it;
- you do not allow financial or other targets to have a negative influence on the quality of treatment or care which you and your colleagues provide;
- all the members of your team understand their roles and responsibilities, including what decisions and actions have and have not been delegated to them; and
- you encourage your team to work together effectively and put in place systems to review and monitor individual and team performance.

## Encouraging team members to raise concerns

**5.5** If you employ, manage or lead a team, you should do the following.

- Encourage all team members, including temporary team members, team members on different sites and locums, to raise concerns about the safety of patients, including the risks that may be caused by the way in which the team works.
- Support team members who raise concerns.
- Take steps to deal with any problems in the standards and performance of the team.
- Have systems in place for dealing supportively with problems in the health, behaviour or professional performance of team members.

## Handling complaints

- 5.6** If you employ, manage or lead a team, you should make sure that:
- you have an effective procedure in place for dealing with patient complaints;
  - everyone in your team is familiar with the complaints procedure (provide training in how to deal with patients' concerns and complaints and how to apologise and offer practical solutions); and
  - you follow our guidance 'Principles of complaints handling'.

## Medical emergencies

- 5.7** Medical emergencies can happen at any time in dental practice. If you employ, manage or lead a team, you should make sure that:
- there are arrangements for at least two people available to deal with medical emergencies when treatment is planned to take place;
  - all members of staff, not just the registered team members, know their role if a patient collapses or there is another kind of medical emergency; and
  - all members of staff who might be involved in dealing with a medical emergency are trained and prepared to deal with such an emergency at any time, and practise together regularly in a simulated emergency so they know exactly what to do.

## GUIDANCE THAT SUPPORTS THIS BOOKLET

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

- Standards for Dental Professionals (published May 2005)
- Principles of Patient Confidentiality (published May 2005)
- Principles of Patient Consent (published May 2005)
- 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 range of further sources of information and advice for dental professionals and the public on our website at **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**

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## 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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