

ETHICS IN DENTISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The dental profession holds a position of unique trust in the community. Because of this, society accords the profession specific privileges that are not available to the broader population. The profession guarantees society that its members will uphold high ethical standards of conduct in exchange. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that examines moral questions of right and wrong. It focuses on the moral obligations of dentists to their patients, the community, and their fellow professionals. Dentists have a responsibility to live ethically in the course of their professional endeavours. The history, philosophy, theories, and foundational ethical rules that dentists should abide by are all covered in this article.

Key Words: Ethics, Profession, Philosophy, Dentist

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that "concerns with establishing, safeguarding, and advocating the concepts of right and wrong behaviour " The word ethics is derived from the Greek ethos, which initially intended as character or behaviour. It is frequently used synonymously with the word moral, which is derived from the Latin word mores, which implies conventions or habits. Together, these two phrases allude to the behaviour, personality, and motives that underlie moral behaviour. As a result, moral obligation imposes ethics rather than a profession or the law.¹ Ethics is not a set of laws, regulations, or even a form of religion. Essentially,

complicated solutions. The literature directs us toward a comprehension of what is right and bad in our behaviour.² The dentistry industry as a whole and each individual dentist have a responsibility to acknowledge the covenantal fidelity and the reciprocity of the connection that exists with society. The dentist has a responsibility to live their professional lives in accordance with morally sound values.³ "how" to proceed "why" to progress, and "when" to proceed with treatment are all influenced by dental ethics, which play a significant part in the day-to-day practice of dental hygiene. Additionally,

knowledge, presentation, and communication are crucial ideas in upholding dental ethics standards.

Dental ethics refer to a dental professional's moral commitments and duties to his patients, skilled colleagues, and the general public. These are referred to as "micro-ethical" principles and help to promote self-control and self-confidence, protect the weak, and government support in advance and individual uniformity, whereas "macro-ethical" principles are a collection of norms designed to protect human pride, reliability, self-assurance, classification, freedoms, and strength of the populace and individuals involving them.⁴

The Dental Council of India (DCI) set the guidelines for dentists in 1976. (the Code of Ethics), which was then updated in 2014. Every dentist who has registered with the board is required to study these rules, comprehend their requirements, and follow them.⁵

The importance of ethics will need to increase as dentistry enters the twenty-first century. Modern dentistry's ethical standards are now advancing quickly. However, the field of study and sub discipline of dental ethics within the study of moral theories and professional ethics principles are still in their infancy. The study of ethical issues in dentistry and the application of ethical theories to such issues are still in their infancy. This is true even though there has been a significant increase in the study of ethics in dental literature.⁶

WHY ETHICS IS IMPORTANT

Dental professionals must be taught morals. Before graduating and being permitted to practice dentistry, dental students must learn and be evaluated on the specific aspects of technique they can employ. They must also receive instruction on effective sets of principles, known as "Code of Ethics" Every decision made in a dental practice, including judging and choosing, is influenced by ethics. Relationships between dental professionals and patients, the general public, office personnel, and other professionals are also impacted by ethics. Sometimes the options are very clear-cut and simple, and other times they might be very confusing. These decisions about dental practice are inextricably linked to ethics. By disregarding morals, dental professionals impair patient care and jeopardise their ability to perform professionally. The issues of corrective practice, medical care administrations, and examination are determined by using fundamental moral standards and rules. By requesting that they reflect on and reevaluate their actions, choices, and justifications, ethics illustrates the doctor's duty.⁷

ETHICS EVOLUTION AND ITS PHILOSOPHY

The earliest ethical theory was mystified. As one follows the development of ethics, they have progressively delved deeper into the realm of mystery and conjecture. Then, based on their

observations, humans began to gather and preserve knowledge. People were concerned with their future and believed in an afterlife during the history of Egypt and Babylonia. A description of the immortality of the soul and a list of actions that lead to a desired fate are found in Egyptian "Book of the Dead," which dates to 3500 BC. The "Vedas" were created in India before 1000 BC. The "Upanishads" were among the Vedic texts that had been enlarged, and they were notable for their talks on a variety of issues, including morality, God, and death. Greek philosophy developed around 470 BC. The philosophy of the individual's group determined whether a person's behaviour was proper or bad, according to philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. They all adhere to the same code. In the Middle Ages, philosophy and religion collaborated to adapt ancient ideas to new contexts because they shared a similar ethical concern. Christians were identified, and scientific advancements fueled a resurgence of learning.

In general, In the 19th century, everyone had equality and plenty, and it was also a time when scientific theories began to take centre stage. The 20th century brought a wide diversity of moral viewpoints, allowing everyone the freedom to select their own moral standards.⁸

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES:

The profession's aspirational goals are the Principles of Ethics. They offer direction and support for the Advisory Opinions and the Code of TMU J Dent Vol.9; Issue 4; October-December 2022

Professional Conduct. The ADA Code is built upon the six guiding principles of patient autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and truthfulness, confidentiality. Principles may conflict with one another for precedence or they may overlap. The Code of Professional Conduct may support certain sections with one or more principles. Although principles occasionally need to be balanced against one another, they otherwise serve as the profession's unwavering standards.⁹

PATIENT AUTONOMY: ("self-governance"): derived from Greek; Autos (self) and Nomos (rule, governance, or law).⁸ According to this principle, the dentist owes it to the patient to respect their rights to privacy and self-determination.⁹ According to this theory, the dentist's top duties include protecting the patient's privacy and meaningfully involving the patient in treatment decisions while taking into account their needs, desires, and abilities.¹⁰

NON-MALEFICENCE: ("do no harm") The term "nonmaleficence" is derived from the ancient maxim "primum non nocere" which is translated from Latin. It means "first, do no harm"^[8] The doctors have a responsibility to reduce risks to their patients in order to avoid intentional harm and protect patients from harm.¹⁰

The primary responsibilities of a dentist include maintaining knowledge and skills, being aware of one's own limitations and when to seek the advice

of a specialist or other professional, and being aware of when and under what circumstances delegation of patient care to auxiliaries is appropriate.¹¹

BENEFICENCE: (“do good”). The dentist has a duty to promote the patient’s welfare. This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to act for the benefit of others. Under this principle, Providing care for patients and the general public is the dentist's top priority.¹⁰ The delivery of dental care in a timely manner while being competent and respectful of the patient's needs, wants, and values is the most crucial part of this obligation. It must be done within the parameters of the patient's clinical circumstances.¹²

There are several parts to this principle: Community service includes giving needy individuals free or discounted dental care, reporting research findings that improve public health, and alerting the appropriate authorities to symptoms of domestic violence and child abuse.⁷

JUSTICE: (“fairness”) Justice is usually characterized as being fair, but it demands consideration of broader social issues of equity and distribution of services. Dentists should treat patients fairly, regardless of their race, creed, colour, sexual orientation, or national origin. Referrals to other dental specialists shouldn't be made in a biased manner. According to Ozar and Sokol, the specialist's technical and communication

skills, demeanour, and dental practice e philosophy should be taken into account when making referrals. Without interfering with the patient's previous dentist's treatment, the consulting dentist should provide dental care. However, if a dental professional treats a patient in a flagrantly improper manner, it is their duty to report it to the public in a way that is compliant with the law.^{1,7}

VERACITY: (“truthfulness”) The dentist has a duty to communicate truthfully and also keeping in mind the importance of trust in the dentist-patient connection. It involves speaking the truth without lying and preserving one's integrity as a thinker. This idea explains the accuracy of billing and advertising. It is unethical for a dental professional to advise unnecessary treatment, to refer a patient to a specialist, or to suggest a product for their own gain. Advertising that just conveys a partial picture of events is also inappropriate. Dentists should be open and honest about the degrees and specialisations they've achieved.⁷

CONFIDENTIALITY: Gaining the trust of the patient is crucial, and earning that trust has been a cornerstone of ethical standards throughout history, beginning with the Hippocratic Oath. The Declaration from Geneva 21 modified this ancient oath by stating that the doctor must uphold any secrets revealed to him, although the patient passed away.⁸

Dentists won't disclose information about their patients to others without their permission because the doctor-patient connection is based on trust. They also need to be aware that this obligation also applies to their staff. Any potential discrimination brought on by the release of personal information must be avoided at all costs for the patient. Asking the patient personal questions is one of the dentist's duties, but the dentist also has a responsibility to keep this information private.⁹

RESPONSIBILITIES OF DENTAL PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS THEIR PATIENTS

- To deliver the greatest standard of treatment to patients as soon as feasible.
- Recognising the needs the patient has brought up and the resources of the staff.
- To describe treatments for each patient based on the particulars of their disease.
- To educate patients so they can choose their own course of treatment.
- They must treat every patient equally.
- The severity of a patient's illness shouldn't be overstated or understated.
- They ought to respect and uphold the patients' dignity and self-respect.
- They should make a conscious effort to remain sincere and morally upright.¹³

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN DENTISTRY

Dentistry has changed significantly in recent years, just like many other medical specialties. For the private practitioner, there are numerous new challenges as a result of recent advancements in fields like technology, tools, and supplies, managed care policies, an increase in lawsuits, regulations for third-party payment and infection control. Thus, in addition to new practical issues, evolving practice-related circumstances have also given rise to a new range of ethical issues that were less common in the past.

It is crucial to understand that new problems will always arise, and it is the dentists' responsibility to invest the time to learn how to handle specific problems.¹

CONSENT

The word consent denotes voluntarily given consent, compliance, or agreement. The ethical concern with respecting autonomy, individual integrity, and self-determination is where the concept of consent comes from. Additionally, it is a matter of law that protects each patient's right to only have their consent before being touched or given other types of care. A successful management of treatment and a positive outcome for everyone depend on the patient's trust, cooperation, and—most importantly—agreement. It serves as proof that the clinician asked for and received consent to intervene and affect the patient's physical integrity.¹⁴

The two reasons of consent are medical and legal. A valid consent must satisfy three requirements:

1. Voluntariness: Means that the patient should be free to give consent without being pressed by the dentist or anybody else.

2. Capacity to consent: The patient should be able to comprehend the goal, implications, and effects of the treatment.

3. Age of consent: There are two schools of thinking about the definition of the age of consent under Indian law. According to one, a person's consent who is intoxicated, mentally incapacitated, or younger than 12 years old is void. On second consideration, a competent, sensible adult who is at least 18 years old is legally capable to enter into a contract.⁷

A parent or legal guardian must give their consent for patients who are minors or adults with mental illnesses. Any accompanying adult who is not a legal guardian of the child patient is not permitted by law to give consent for dental treatment.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Professionalism is a fundamental skill and topic of discussion in all health professional education. The Dental Council of India is responsible for overseeing dentistry in India. The DCI is in charge of ensuring that the dental profession adheres to high moral and legal standards. Individual dentists must, however, act in the patient's best interest and

deliver the highest calibre of clinical care. The informed consent process is a crucial part of clinical care because it complies with the fundamental principles of patient autonomy and respect. To safeguard against any commercial, legal, and medico-legal litigation, it is necessary to maintain the records formally and professionally. When a dentist is negligent, irate or angry patients may seek redress under the Consumer Protection Act. This may lead to the patient, the consumer, receiving financial compensation for the dentist's subpar services. Avoiding a lawsuit in the first place is the best defence, and upholding ethical standards is essential to effective practice.

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