Standards

General Dental Council

protecting patients,
regulating the dental team

This document sets out the standards of conduct, performance and ethics that govern you as a dental professional. It specifies the principles, standards and guidance which apply to all members of the dental team. It also sets out what patients can expect from their dental professionals.

Principles
The core ethical principles of practice

Patient expectations
What patients can expect from the dental team

Standards
What registrants must do to ensure patient expectations are met

Guidance
How registrants meet the standards

There are nine principles registered dental professionals must keep to at all times. As a GDC registrant you must:

1	Put patients' interests first
2	Communicate effectively with patients
3	Obtain valid consent
4	Maintain and protect patients' information
5	Have a clear and effective complaints procedure
6	Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests
7	Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills
8	Raise concerns if patients are at risk
9	Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession

Standards for the Dental Team applies to:

— Dentists
— Dental Nurses
— Dental Hygienists
— Dental Therapists
— Orthodontic Therapists
— Dental Technicians
— Clinical Dental Technicians

The principles are all equally important and are not listed in order of priority. They are supplemented by additional guidance documents which can be found on our website at **www.gdc-uk.org** and which you must also follow.

You have an individual responsibility to behave professionally and follow these principles at all times.

The **standards** set out what you must do. If you do not meet these standards, you may be removed from our register and not be able to work as a dental professional.

The **guidance** is there to help you to meet the standards. You are expected to follow the guidance, to use your professional judgment, demonstrate insight at all times and be able to justify any decision that is not in line with the guidance. Serious or persistent failure to follow the guidance could see you removed from our register and not able to work as a dental professional.

Throughout this document:

- '**must**' is used where the duty is compulsory;
- '**should**' is used where the duty would not apply in all situations and where there are exceptional circumstances outside your control that could affect whether, or how, you can comply with the guidance. Should is also used when we are providing an explanation of how you will meet the overriding duty.

If we receive information which brings your fitness to practise into question, such as a complaint or a conviction, we will refer to the standards and the guidance to judge whether you are fit to practise as a dental professional.

Principle One

Put patients' interests first

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- To be listened to and have their preferences and concerns taken into account.
- To be treated as individuals and have their cultures and values respected.
- That all members of the dental team will be honest and act with integrity.
- That all aspects of their health and well-being will be considered and they will receive dental care that is appropriate for them.
- To be treated in a clean and safe environment.
- That reasonable adjustments will be made for any disabilities.
- That their interests will be put before financial gain and business need.
- Redress if they suffer harm during dental treatment.
- That their dental pain and anxiety will be managed appropriately.

Standards

You must:

1.1 Listen to your patients.

1.2 Treat every patient with dignity and respect at all times.

1.3 Be honest and act with integrity.

1.4 Take a holistic and preventative approach to patient care which is appropriate to the individual patient.

1.5 Treat patients in a hygienic and safe environment.

1.6 Treat patients fairly, as individuals and without discrimination.

1.7 Put patients' interests before your own or those of any colleague, business or organisation.

1.8 Have appropriate arrangements in place for patients to seek compensation if they suffer harm.

1.9 Find out about laws and regulations that affect your work and follow them.

Guidance

Standard 1.1
You must listen to your patients

1.1.1 You must discuss treatment options with patients and listen carefully to what they say. Give them the opportunity to have a discussion and to ask questions.

Standard 1.2
You must treat every patient with dignity and respect at all times

1.2.1 You should be aware of how your tone of voice and body language might be perceived.

1.2.2 You should take patients' preferences into account and be sensitive to their individual needs and values.

1.2.3 You must treat patients with kindness and compassion.

1.2.4 You should manage patients' dental pain and anxiety appropriately.

Standard 1.3
You must be honest and act with integrity

1.3.1 You must justify the trust that patients, the public and your colleagues place in you by always acting honestly and fairly in your dealings with them. This applies to any business or education activities in which you are involved as well as to your professional dealings.

1.3.2 You must make sure you do not bring the profession into disrepute.

1.3.3 You must make sure that any advertising, promotional material or other information that you produce is accurate and not misleading, and complies with the GDC's guidance on ethical advertising.

Standard 1.4

You must take a holistic and preventative approach to patient care which is appropriate to the individual patient

1.4.1 A holistic approach means you must take account of patients' overall health, their psychological and social needs, their long term oral health needs and their desired outcomes.

1.4.2 You must provide patients with treatment that is in their best interests, providing appropriate oral health advice and following clinical guidelines relevant to their situation. You may need to balance their oral health needs with their desired outcomes.

If their desired outcome is not achievable or is not in the best interests of their oral health, you must explain the risks, benefits and likely outcomes to help them to make a decision.

Standard 1.5

You must treat patients in a hygienic and safe environment

1.5.1 You must find out about the laws and regulations which apply to your clinical practice, your premises and your obligations as an employer and you must follow them at all times. This will include (but is not limited to) legislation relating to:

- the disposal of clinical and other hazardous waste
- radiography
- health and safety
- decontamination
- medical devices.

(Further information on laws and regulations can be found on our website. Your professional association or defence organisation can also help you to find out which laws and regulations apply to your work.)

Guidance

1.5.2 You must make sure that you have all necessary vaccinations and follow guidance relating to blood-borne viruses.

1.5.3 You must follow the guidance on medical emergencies and training updates issued by the Resuscitation Council (UK).

1.5.4 You must record all patient safety incidents and report them promptly to the appropriate national body.

Standard 1.6

You must treat patients fairly, as individuals and without discrimination

1.6.1 You must not discriminate against patients on the grounds of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

You must also ensure that you do not discriminate against patients or groups of patients for any other reasons such as nationality, special needs, health, lifestyle or any other consideration.

1.6.2 You must be aware of and adhere to all your responsibilities as set out in relevant equalities legislation.

1.6.3 You must consider patients' disabilities and make reasonable adjustments to allow them to receive care which meets their needs. If you cannot make reasonable adjustments to treat a patient safely, you should consider referring them to a colleague.

1.6.4 You must not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious or moral beliefs) to patients in any way that exploits their vulnerability or could cause them distress.

Standard 1.7

You must put patients' interests before your own or those of any colleague, business or organisation

1.7.1 You must always put your patients' interests before any financial, personal or other gain.

1.7.2 If you work in a practice that provides both NHS (or equivalent health service) and private treatment (a mixed practice), you must make clear to your patients which treatments can be provided under the NHS (or equivalent health service) and which can only be provided on a private basis.

1.7.3 You must not mislead patients into believing that treatments which are available on the NHS (or equivalent health service) can only be provided privately. If you work in a purely private practice, you should make sure that patients know this before they attend for treatment.

Guidance

1.7.4 If you work in a mixed practice, you must not pressurise patients into having private treatment if it is available to them under the NHS (or equivalent health service) and they would prefer to have it under the NHS (or equivalent health service).

1.7.5 You must refuse any gifts, payment or hospitality if accepting them could affect, or could appear to affect, your professional judgment.

1.7.6 When you are referring patients to another member of the dental team, you must make sure that the referral is made in the patients' best interests rather than for your own, or another team member's, financial gain or benefit.

1.7.7 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 must take prompt and appropriate action.

1.7.8 In rare circumstances, the trust between you and a patient may break down, and you may find it necessary to end the professional relationship. You should not stop providing a service to a patient solely because of a complaint the patient has made about you or your team.

Before you end a professional relationship with a patient, you must be satisfied that your decision is fair and you must be able to justify your decision. You should write to the patient to tell them your decision and your reasons for it. You should take steps to ensure that arrangements are made promptly for the continuing care of the patient.

Standard 1.8

You must have appropriate arrangements in place for patients to seek compensation if they have suffered harm

1.8.1 You must have appropriate insurance or indemnity in place to make sure your patients can claim any compensation to which they may be entitled (See our website for further guidance on what types of insurance or indemnity the GDC considers to be appropriate).

1.8.2 You should ensure that you keep to the terms and conditions of your insurance or indemnity and contact the provider as soon as possible when a claim is made. A delay in contacting the provider could disadvantage patients and may affect the level of help you receive from the provider.

Standard 1.9

You must find out about laws and regulations that affect your work and follow them

1.9.1 You must find out about, and follow, laws and regulations affecting your work. This includes, but is not limited to, those relating to:

- data protection
- employment
- human rights and equality
- registration with other regulatory bodies.

(See our website for more information.)

Principle Two

Communicate effectively with patients

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- To receive full, clear and accurate information that they can understand, before, during and after treatment, so that they can make informed decisions in partnership with the people providing their care.
- A clear explanation of the treatment, possible outcomes and what they can expect.
- To know how much their treatment will cost before it starts, and to be told about any changes.
- Communication that they can understand.
- To know the names of those providing their care.

You must:

2.1 Communicate effectively with patients – listen to them, give them time to consider information and take their individual views and communication needs into account.

2.2 Recognise and promote patients' rights to and responsibilities for making decisions about their health priorities and care.

2.3 Give patients the information they need, in a way they can understand, so that they can make informed decisions.

2.4 Give patients clear information about costs.

Guidance

Standard 2.1

You must communicate effectively with patients – listen to them, give them time to consider information and take their individual views and communication needs into account

2.1.1 You must treat patients as individuals. You should take their specific communication needs and preferences into account where possible and respect any cultural values and differences.

2.1.2 You must be sufficiently fluent in written and spoken English to communicate effectively with patients, their relatives, the dental team and other healthcare professionals in the United Kingdom.

Standard 2.2

You must recognise and promote patients' rights to and responsibilities for making decisions about their health priorities and care

2.2.1 You must listen to patients and communicate effectively with them at a level they can understand. Before treatment starts you must:

- explain the options (including those of delaying treatment or doing nothing) with the risks and benefits of each; and
- give full information on the treatment you propose and the possible costs.

2.2.2 You should encourage patients to ask questions about their options or any aspect of their treatment.

2.2.3 You must give full and honest answers to any questions patients have about their options or treatment.

Standard 2.3

You must give patients the information they need, in a way they can understand, so that they can make informed decisions

2.3.1 You should introduce yourself to patients and explain your role so that they know how you will be involved in their care.

2.3.2 Other members of your team may have valuable knowledge about the patients' backgrounds or concerns so you should involve them (and the patients' carers if relevant) in discussion with patients where appropriate.

2.3.3 You should recognise patients' communication difficulties and try to meet the patients' particular communication needs by, for example:

- not using professional jargon and acronyms;
- using an interpreter for patients whose first language is not English;
- suggesting that patients bring someone with them who can use sign language; and
- providing an induction loop to help patients who wear hearing aids.

2.3.4 You should satisfy yourself that patients have understood the information you have given them, for example by asking questions and summarising the main points of your discussion.

2.3.5 You should make sure that patients have enough information and enough time to ask questions and make a decision.

Guidance

2.3.6 You must give patients a written treatment plan, or plans, before their treatment starts and you should retain a copy in their notes. You should also ask patients to sign the treatment plan.

2.3.7 Whenever you provide a treatment plan you must include:

- the proposed treatment;
- a realistic indication of the cost;
- whether the treatment is being provided under the NHS (or equivalent health service) or privately (if mixed, the treatment plan should clearly indicate which elements are being provided under which arrangement).

2.3.8 You should keep the treatment plan and estimated costs under review during treatment. You must inform your patients immediately if the treatment plan changes and provide them with an updated version in writing.

2.3.9 You must provide patients with clear information about your arrangements for emergency care including the out of hours arrangements.

2.3.10 You should make sure patients have the details they need to allow them to contact you by their preferred method.

2.3.11 You should provide patients with clear information about any referral arrangements related to their treatment.

Standard 2.4

You must give patients clear information about costs

2.4.1 You must make sure that a simple price list is clearly displayed in your reception or waiting area. This should include a list of basic items including a consultation, a single-surface filling, an extraction, radiographs (bitewing or pan-oral) and treatment provided by the hygienist. For items which may vary in cost, a 'from - to' price range can be shown.

2.4.2 You must give clear information on prices in your practice literature and on your websites - patients should not have to ask for this information.

2.4.3 You should tell your patients whether treatment is guaranteed, under what circumstances and for how long. You should make clear any circumstances under which treatment is not guaranteed (for example, a lack of care on their part which leads to recurring problems).

3

Principle Three

Obtain valid consent

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- To be asked for their consent to treatment before it starts.

You must:

3.1 Obtain valid consent before starting treatment, explaining all the relevant options and the possible costs.

3.2 Make sure that patients (or their representatives) understand the decisions they are being asked to make.

3.3 Make sure that the patient's consent remains valid at each stage of investigation or treatment.

Guidance

Standard 3.1

You must obtain valid consent before starting treatment, explaining all the relevant options and the possible costs.

3.1.1 You must make sure you have valid consent before starting any treatment or investigation. This applies whether you are the first member of your team to see the patient or whether you are involved after other team members have already seen them. Do not assume that someone else has obtained the patient's consent.

3.1.2 You should document the discussions you have with patients in the process of gaining consent. Although a signature on a form is important in verifying that a patient has given consent, it is the discussions that take place with the patient that determine whether the consent is valid.

3.1.3 You should find out what your patients want to know as well as what you think they need to know. Things that patients might want to know include:

- options for treatment, the risks and the potential benefits;
- why you think a particular treatment is necessary and appropriate for them;
- the consequences, risks and benefits of the treatment you propose;
- the likely prognosis;
- your recommended option;
- the cost of the proposed treatment;
- what might happen if the proposed treatment is not carried out; and
- whether the treatment is guaranteed, how long it is guaranteed for and any exclusions that apply.

3.1.4 You must check and document that patients have understood the information you have given.

3.1.5 Patients can withdraw their consent at any time, refuse treatment or ask for it to be stopped after it has started. You must acknowledge their right to do this and follow their wishes.

You should explain the consequences or risks of not continuing the treatment and ensure that the patient knows that they are responsible for any future problems which arise as a result of not completing the treatment. You must record all this in the patient's notes.

3.1.6 You must obtain written consent where treatment involves conscious sedation or general anaesthetic.

Standard 3.2

You must make sure that patients (or their representatives) understand the decisions they are being asked to make.

3.2.1 You must provide patients with sufficient information and give them a reasonable amount of time to consider that information in order to make a decision.

3.2.2 You must tailor the way you obtain consent to each patient's needs. You should help them to make informed decisions about their care by giving them information in a format they can easily understand.

3.2.3 When obtaining consent, you should encourage patients who have communication difficulties to have a friend, relative or carer with them to help them ask questions or understand your answers.

Guidance

3.2.4 You must always consider whether patients are able to make decisions about their care themselves, and avoid making assumptions about a patient's ability to give consent.

This is a complex area and you should refer to the appropriate legislation. You can find further information on our website or you can contact your defence organisation for further advice.

3.2.5 You must check and document that patients have understood the information you have given them.

Standard 3.3

You must make sure that the patient's consent remains valid at each stage of investigation or treatment

3.3.1 Giving and obtaining consent is a process, not a one-off event. It should be part of on-going communication between patients and all members of the dental team involved in their care. You should keep patients informed about the progress of their care.

3.3.2 When carrying out an on-going course of treatment, you must make sure you have specific consent for what you are going to do during that appointment.

3.3.3 You must tailor the way you confirm ongoing consent to each patient's needs and check that patients have understood the information you have given them.

3.3.4 You must document the discussions you have with patients in the process of confirming their ongoing consent.

3.3.5 If you think that you need to change a patient's agreed treatment or the estimated cost, you must obtain your patient's consent to the changes and document that you have done so.

4

Principle Four

Maintain and protect patients' information

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- Their records to be up to date, complete, clear, accurate and legible.
- Their personal details to be kept confidential.
- To be able to access their dental records.
- Their records to be stored securely.

You must:

4.1 Make and keep contemporaneous, complete and accurate patient records.

4.2 Protect the confidentiality of patients' information and only use it for the purpose for which it was given.

4.3 Only release a patient's information without their permission in exceptional circumstances.

4.4 Ensure that patients can have access to their records.

4.5 Keep patients' information secure at all times, whether your records are held on paper or electronically.

Guidance

Standard 4.1

You must make and keep contemporaneous, complete and accurate patient records

4.1.1 You must make and keep complete and accurate patient records, including an up-to-date medical history, each time that you treat patients.

Radiographs, consent forms, photographs, models, audio or visual recordings of consultations, laboratory prescriptions, statements of conformity and referral letters all form part of patients records where they are available.

4.1.2 You should record as much detail as possible about the discussions you have with your patients, including evidence that valid consent has been obtained. You should also include details of any particular patient's treatment needs where appropriate.

4.1.3 You must understand and meet your responsibilities in relation to patient information in line with current legislation. You must follow appropriate national advice on retaining, storing and disposing of patient records.

4.1.4 You must ensure that all documentation that records your work, including patient records, is clear, legible, accurate, and can be readily understood by others. You must also record the name or initials of the treating clinician.

4.1.5 If you need to make any amendments to a patient's records you must make sure that the changes are clearly marked up and dated.

4.1.6 If you refer a patient to another dental professional or other health professional, you must make an accurate record of this referral in the patient's notes and include a written prescription when necessary.

Standard 4.2

You must protect the confidentiality of patients' information and only use it for the purpose for which it was given

4.2.1 Confidentiality is central to the relationship and trust between you and your patients. You must keep patient information confidential.

This applies to all the information about patients that you have learnt in your professional role including personal details, medical history, what treatment they are having and how much it costs.

4.2.2 You must ensure that non-registered members of the dental team are aware of the importance of confidentiality and that they keep patient information confidential at all times.

4.2.3 You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified. See our website for further guidance on social networking.

4.2.4 You must not talk about patients or their treatment in places where you can be overheard by people who should not have access to the information you are discussing.

Guidance

4.2.5 You must explain to patients the circumstances in which you may need to share information with others involved in their healthcare. This includes making sure that they understand:

- what information you will be releasing;
- why you will be releasing it; and
- the likely consequences of you releasing the information.

You must give your patients the opportunity to withhold their permission to share information in this way unless exceptional circumstances apply. You must record in your patient's notes whether or not they gave their permission.

4.2.6 If a patient allows you to share information about them, you should ensure that anyone you share it with understands that it is confidential.

4.2.7 If other people ask you to provide information about patients (for example, for teaching or research), or if you want to use patient information such as photographs for any reason, you must:

- explain to patients how the information or images will be used;
- check that patients understand what they are agreeing to;
- obtain and record the patients' consent to their use;
- only release or use the minimum information necessary for the purpose; and
- explain to the patients that they can withdraw their permission at any time.

If it is not necessary for patients to be identified, you must make sure they remain anonymous in any information you release.

4.2.8 You must keep patient information confidential even after patients die.

4.2.9 The duty to keep information confidential also covers recordings or images of patients such as photographs, videos or audio recordings, both originals and copies, including those made on a mobile phone. You must not make any recordings or images without the patient's permission.

Standard 4.3

You must only release a patient's information without their permission in exceptional circumstances

4.3.1 In exceptional circumstances, you may be justified in releasing confidential patient information without their consent if doing so is in the best interests of the public or the patient. This could happen if a patient puts their own safety or that of others at serious risk, or if information about a patient could be important in preventing or detecting a serious crime.

If you believe that revealing information about a patient is in the best interests of the public or the patient you should first try to get the patient's permission to release the information.

You should do everything you can to encourage the patient to either release the information themselves or to give you permission to do so. You must document the efforts you have made to obtain consent in the patient's notes.

4.3.2 If obtaining consent from a patient to the release of their information in the public interest is not practical or appropriate, or if the patient will not give their permission, you should get advice from your defence organisation or professional association before you release the information.

Guidance

4.3.3 If you have information that a patient is or could be at risk of significant harm, or you suspect that a patient is a victim of abuse, you must inform the appropriate social care agencies or the police. See our website for further guidance.

4.3.4 You can be ordered by a court, or you can be under a statutory duty, to release information about a patient without their permission. If this happens, you should only release the minimum amount of information necessary to comply with the court order or statutory duty.

4.3.5 In any circumstance where you decide to release confidential information, you must document your reasons and be prepared to explain and justify your decision and actions.

Standard 4.4
You must ensure that patients can have access to their records

4.4.1 Although patients do not own their dental records, they have the right to access them under Data Protection legislation. If patients ask for access to their records, you must arrange for this promptly, in accordance with the law.

4.4.2 In some circumstances you can charge patients a fee for accessing their records. The maximum you can charge depends on whether the records are paper copies or held electronically. You should check the latest guidance issued by your national Information Commissioner's Office.

Standard 4.5

You must keep patients' information secure at all times, whether your records are held on paper or electronically

4.5.1 You must make sure that patients' information is not revealed accidentally and that no-one has unauthorised access to it by storing it securely at all times. You must not leave records where they can be seen by other patients, unauthorised staff or members or the public.

4.5.2 If you are sending confidential information, you should use a secure method. If you are sending or storing confidential information electronically, you should ensure that it is encrypted.

4.5.3 If clinical records are computerised, you should make back-up copies of clinical records, radiographs and other images.

Principle Five

Have a clear and effective complaints procedure

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- Their concerns or complaints to be acknowledged, listened to and dealt with promptly.

You must:

5.1 Make sure that there is an effective complaints procedure readily available for patients to use, and follow that procedure at all times.

5.2 Respect a patient's right to complain.

5.3 Give patients who complain a prompt and constructive response.

Guidance

Standard 5.1

You must make sure that there is an effective complaints procedure readily available for patients to use, and follow that procedure at all times

5.1.1 It is part of your responsibility as a dental professional to deal with complaints properly and professionally. You must:

- ensure that there is an effective written complaints procedure where you work;
- follow the complaints procedure at all times;
- respond to complaints within the time limits set out in the procedure; and
- provide a constructive response to the complaint.

5.1.2 You should make sure that everyone (dental professionals, other staff and patients) knows about the complaints procedure and understands how it works. If you are an employer, or you manage a team, you must ensure that all staff are trained in handling complaints.

5.1.3 If you work for a practice that provides NHS (or equivalent health service) treatment, or if you work in a hospital, you should follow the procedure set down by that organisation.

5.1.4 If you work in private practice, including private practice owned by a dental body corporate, you should make sure that it has a procedure which sets similar standards and time limits to the NHS (or equivalent health service) procedure.

5.1.5 You should make sure that your complaints procedure:

- is displayed where patients can see it - patients should not have to ask for a copy;
- is clearly written in plain language and is available in other formats if needed;
- is easy for patients to understand and follow;
- provides information on other independent organisations that patients can contact to raise concerns;
- allows you to deal with complaints promptly and efficiently;
- allows you to investigate complaints in a full and fair way;
- explains the possible outcomes;
- allows information that can be used to improve services to pass back to your practice management or equivalent; and
- respects patients' confidentiality.

5.1.6 Complaints can be an opportunity to improve your service. You should analyse any complaints that you receive to help you improve the service you offer, and share lessons learnt from complaints with all team members.

5.1.7 You should keep a written record of all complaints together with your responses. This record should be separate from your patient records so that patients are not discouraged from making a complaint.

You should use your record of complaints to monitor your performance in handling complaints and identify any areas that need to be improved.

Guidance

Standard 5.2
You must respect a patient's right to complain

5.2.1 You should not react defensively to complaints. You should listen carefully to patients who complain and involve them fully in the complaints process. You should find out what outcome patients want from their complaint.

Standard 5.3
You must give patients who complain a prompt and constructive response

5.3.1 You should give the patient a copy of the complaints procedure when you acknowledge their complaint so that they understand the stages involved and the timescales.

5.3.2 You should deal with complaints in a calm and constructive way and in line with the complaints procedure.

5.3.3 You should aim to resolve complaints as efficiently, effectively and politely as possible.

5.3.4 You must respond to complaints within the time limits set out in your complaints procedure.

5.3.5 If you need more time to investigate a complaint, you should tell the patient when you will respond.

5.3.6 If there are exceptional circumstances which mean that the complaint cannot be resolved within the usual timescale, you should give the patient regular updates (at least every 10 days) on progress.

5.3.7 You should try to deal with all the points raised in the complaint and, where possible, offer a solution for each one.

5.3.8 You should offer an apology and a practical solution where appropriate.

5.3.9 If a complaint is justified, you should offer a fair solution. This may include offering to put things right at your own expense if you have made a mistake.

5.3.10 You should respond to the patient in writing, setting out your findings and any practical solutions you are prepared to offer. Make sure that the letter is clear, deals with the patient's concerns and is easy for them to understand.

5.3.11 If the patient is not satisfied despite your best efforts to resolve their complaint, you should tell them about other avenues that are open to them, such as the relevant Ombudsman for health service complaints or the Dental Complaints Service for complaints about private dental treatment.

Principle Six

Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- To be fully informed of the different roles of the dental professionals involved in their care.
- That members of the dental team will work effectively together.

You must:

6.1 Work effectively with your colleagues and contribute to good teamwork.

6.2 Be appropriately supported when treating patients.

6.3 Delegate and refer appropriately and effectively.

6.4 Only accept a referral or delegation if you are trained and competent to carry out the treatment and you believe that what you are being asked to do is appropriate for the patient.

6.5 Communicate clearly and effectively with other team members and colleagues in the interests of patients.

6.6 Demonstrate effective management and leadership skills if you manage a team.

Guidance

Standard 6.1

You must work effectively with your colleagues and contribute to good teamwork

6.1.1 You should ensure that any team you are involved in works together to provide appropriate dental care for your patients.

6.1.2 You must treat colleagues fairly and with respect, in all situations and all forms of interaction and communication. You must not bully, harass, or unfairly discriminate against them.

6.1.3 You must treat colleagues fairly in all financial transactions.

6.1.4 You must value and respect the contribution of all team members.

6.1.5 You must ensure that patients are fully informed of the names and roles of the dental professionals involved in their care.

6.1.6 As a registered dental professional, you could be held responsible for the actions of any member of your team who does not have to register with the GDC (for example, receptionists, practice managers or laboratory assistants). You should ensure that they are appropriately trained and competent.

Standard 6.2
You must be appropriately supported when treating patients

6.2.1 You must not provide treatment if you feel that the circumstances make it unsafe for patients.

6.2.2 You should work with another appropriately trained member of the dental team at all times when treating patients in a dental setting.

The only circumstances in which this does not apply are when:

- treating patients in an out of hours emergency;
- providing treatment as part of a public health programme; or
- there are exceptional circumstances.

'Exceptional circumstances' are unavoidable circumstances which are not routine and could not have been foreseen. Absences due to leave or training are not exceptional circumstances.

6.2.3 If there are exceptional circumstances which mean you cannot work with an appropriately trained member of the dental team when treating a patient in a dental setting, you must assess the possible risk to the patient of continuing treatment.

6.2.4 If you are providing treatment in a hospital setting you should be supported by a GDC registrant or a registrant of another healthcare regulator.

6.2.5 If you are providing treatment in a care or domiciliary setting you should be supported by a GDC registrant or an appropriately trained care professional.

Guidance

6.2.6 Medical emergencies can happen at any time. You must make sure that there is at least one other person available within the working environment to deal with medical emergencies when you are treating patients. In exceptional circumstances the second person could be a receptionist or a person accompanying the patient.

Standard 6.3

You must delegate and refer appropriately and effectively

6.3.1 You can delegate the responsibility for a task but not the accountability. This means that, although you can ask someone to carry out a task for you, you could still be held accountable if something goes wrong.

You should only delegate or refer to another member of the team if you are confident that they have been trained and are both competent and indemnified to do what you are asking. For more information, see the 'Scope of Practice' document.

6.3.2 If you delegate a task to another member of the team who does not feel that they are trained or competent to carry it out, you must not take advantage of your position by pressurising them into accepting the task.

6.3.3 You should refer patients on if the treatment required is outside your scope of practice or competence. You should be clear about the procedure for doing this.

6.3.4 If you ask a colleague to provide treatment, a dental appliance, or clinical advice for a patient, you should make your request clear and give your colleague all the information they need.

6.3.5 If you need to refer a patient to someone else for treatment, you must explain the referral process to the patient and make sure that it is recorded in their notes.

Standard 6.4

You must only accept a referral or delegation if you are trained and competent to carry out the treatment and you believe that what you are being asked to do is appropriate for the patient

6.4.1 If a colleague asks you to provide treatment, a dental appliance, or clinical advice for a patient, you must ensure that you are clear about what you are being asked to do and that you have the knowledge and skills to do it.

6.4.2 If you do not think that what you have been asked to do is appropriate, you should discuss this with the colleague who asked you to do it.

You should only go ahead if you are satisfied that what you have been asked to do is appropriate. If you are not sure, you should seek advice from your professional association or defence organisation.

Standard 6.5

You must communicate clearly and effectively with other team members and colleagues in the interests of patients

6.5.1 You should document any discussions you have with colleagues about a patient's treatment, including any decisions you have reached or changed, in that patient's notes.

Guidance

Standard 6.6

You must demonstrate effective management and leadership skills if you manage a team

6.6.1 You should make sure that all team members, including those not registered with the GDC, have:

- a proper induction when they first join the team;
- performance management, including regular appraisals;
- opportunities to learn and develop;
- a hygienic and safe working environment;
- a work environment that is not discriminatory;
- opportunities to provide feedback; and
- a way to raise concerns.

6.6.2 You should make sure that relevant team members are appropriately registered with the GDC or another healthcare regulator, appropriately in-training to be registered with the GDC or another healthcare regulator and that those who are registered with the GDC are also indemnified.

6.6.3 You should encourage all team members, including those not registered with the GDC, to follow the guidance in this document, as well as following it yourself.

6.6.4 You should make sure that you communicate regularly with all members of the team and that all members of the team are involved and included as appropriate.

6.6.5 You must encourage, support and facilitate the continuing professional development (CPD) of your dental team.

6.6.6 Medical emergencies can happen at any time in a dental practice. You must make sure that:

- there are arrangements for at least two people to be available within the working environment to deal with medical emergencies when treatment is planned to take place;
- all members of staff, including those not registered with the GDC, know their role if there is a medical emergency; and
- all members of staff who might be involved in dealing with a medical emergency are trained and prepared to do so at any time, and practise together regularly in a simulated emergency so they know exactly what to do.

6.6.7 You should ensure your team has:

- good leadership;
- clear, shared aims; and
- an understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

6.6.8 You should ensure that all the members of your team understand their roles and responsibilities, including what decisions and actions have, and have not, been delegated to them.

6.6.9 You should discuss all new policies and procedures with your colleagues so that everybody understands them and make sure that all team members are aware of their responsibility to comply with them.

6.6.10 You should display information about the members of your team (including their registration number where appropriate), in an area where it can be easily seen by patients.

6.6.11 You should display the following information in an area where it can be easily seen by patients:

- the fact that you are regulated by the GDC; and
- the nine principles contained in this document.

Principle Seven

Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- To receive good quality care.
- That all members of the dental team:
  - are appropriately trained and qualified;
  - keep their skills up to date;
  - know their limits and refer patients as appropriate; and
  - work within current laws and regulations.

You must:

7.1 Provide good quality care based on current evidence and authoritative guidance.

7.2 Work within your knowledge, skills, professional competence and abilities.

7.3 Update and develop your professional knowledge and skills throughout your working life.

Guidance

Standard 7.1

You must provide good quality care based on current evidence and authoritative guidance

7.1.1 You must find out about current evidence and best practice which affect your work, premises, equipment and business and follow them.

7.1.2 If you deviate from established practice and guidance, you should record the reasons why and be able to justify your decision.

Standard 7.2

You must work within your knowledge, skills, professional competence and abilities

7.2.1 You must only carry out a task or a type of treatment if you are appropriately trained, competent, confident and indemnified. Training can take many different forms. You must be sure that you have undertaken training which is appropriate for you and equips you with the appropriate knowledge and skills to perform a task safely.

7.2.2 You should only deliver treatment and care if you are confident that you have had the necessary training and are competent to do so. If you are not confident to provide treatment, you must refer the patient to an appropriately trained colleague.

7.2.3 You must only work within your mental and physical capabilities.

Standard 7.3

You must update and develop your professional knowledge and skills throughout your working life

7.3.1 You must make sure that you know how much continuing professional development (CPD) activity is required for you to maintain your registration and that you carry it out within the required time.

7.3.2 You should take part in activities that maintain update or develop your knowledge and skills. Your continuing professional development (CPD) activity should improve your practice. For more information, see the GDC's advice on CPD.

Principle Eight

Raise concerns if patients are at risk

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- That the dental team will act promptly to protect their safety if there are concerns about the health, performance or behaviour of a dental professional or the environment where treatment is provided.
- That a dental professional will raise any concerns about the welfare of vulnerable patients.

You must:

8.1 Always put patients' safety first.

8.2 Act promptly if patients or colleagues are at risk and take measures to protect them.

8.3 Make sure if you employ, manage or lead a team that you encourage and support a culture where staff can raise concerns openly and without fear of reprisal.

8.4 Make sure if you employ, manage or lead a team that there is an effective procedure in place for raising concerns, that the procedure is readily available to all staff and that it is followed at all times.

8.5 Take appropriate action if you have concerns about the possible abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

Guidance

Standard 8.1

You must always put patients' safety first

8.1.1 You must raise any concern that patients might be at risk due to:

- the health, behaviour or professional performance of a colleague;
- any aspect of the environment where treatment is provided; or
- someone asking you to do something that you think conflicts with your duties to put patients interests first and act to protect them.

You must raise a concern even if you are not in a position to control or influence your working environment.

Your duty to raise concerns overrides any personal and professional loyalties or concerns you might have (for example, seeming disloyal or being treated differently by your colleagues or managers).

8.1.2 You must not enter into any contract or agreement with your employer or contracting body which contains a 'gagging clause' that would prevent you from raising concerns about patient safety or restrict what you could say when raising a concern.

Standard 8.2

You must act promptly if patients or colleagues are at risk and take measures to protect them

8.2.1 You must act on concerns promptly. Acting quickly may mean that poor practice is identified and tackled without there being a serious risk to patient safety.

If you are not sure whether the issue that worries you amounts to a concern that you should raise, think about what might happen in the short or longer term if you did not mention the issue. If in doubt, you must raise your concern.

8.2.2 You should not have to prove your concern for it to be investigated. If the investigation shows that there was no problem, the fact that you raised the concern should not be held against you as long as you were justified in raising the concern.

Remember that you must put patients' interests first and act to protect them. If you fail to do so by not raising a concern, your own registration could be at risk.

8.2.3 Where possible, you should raise concerns first with your employer or manager. However it may not always be appropriate or possible to raise concerns with them, particularly if they are the source of your concern.

Guidance

8.2.4 If it is not appropriate to raise your concern with your employer or manager, or if they fail to act on your concern, you must raise your concerns with your local commissioner of health or with the appropriate body from the following:

- the Care Quality Commission
- Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
- the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

You can also get advice from your defence organisation or professional association.

8.2.5 If you think that the public and patients need to be protected from a dental professional registered with the GDC, you must refer your concern to us. This may be appropriate when:

- taking action at a local level is not practical; or
- action at a local level has failed; or
- the problem is so severe that the GDC clearly needs to be involved (for example, issues of indecency, violence, dishonesty, serious crime or illegal practice); or
- there is a genuine fear of victimisation or deliberate concealment; or
- you believe a registrant may not be fit to practise because of his or her health, performance or conduct.

8.2.6 You must refer concerns about other healthcare professionals to the relevant regulator.

Standard 8.3

You must make sure if you employ, manage or lead a team that you encourage and support a culture where staff can raise concerns openly and without fear of reprisal

8.3.1 You must promote a culture of openness in the workplace so that staff feel able to raise concerns.

8.3.2 You should embed this culture into your policies and procedures, beginning with staff training and induction.

8.3.3 You should encourage all staff, including temporary staff, staff on different sites and locums, to raise concerns about the safety of patients, including the risks that may be posed by colleagues, premises, equipment or practice policies.

8.3.4 You must not offer staff contracts which contain a 'gagging clause' that would prevent them from raising concerns about patient safety or restrict what they could say when raising a concern.

Guidance

Standard 8.4

You must make sure if you employ, manage or lead a team, that there is an effective procedure in place for raising concerns, that the procedure is readily available to all staff and that it is followed at all times

8.4.1 You must make sure there are written procedures in place to enable staff members to raise concerns. This means:

- being aware of and adhering to current laws and regulations;
- supporting staff members who raise concerns;
- taking steps to tackle any shortfalls in the standards and performance of staff; and
- having systems in place for supporting staff who may be having problems with their health, behaviour or professional performance.

8.4.2 When a member of your team has raised a concern, you must:

- take the concerns seriously;
- maintain confidentiality when appropriate;
- investigate promptly and properly and make an unbiased assessment of the concern;
- keep the staff member who raised the concern advised of progress, explaining any action taken or reasons for not taking action; and
- ensure that you monitor the action you take to solve the problem.

Standard 8.5

You must take appropriate action if you have concerns about the possible abuse of children or vulnerable adults

8.5.1 You must raise any concerns you may have about the possible abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults. You must know who to contact for further advice and how to refer concerns to an appropriate authority such as your local social services department.

8.5.2 You must find out about local procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. You must follow these procedures if you suspect that a child or vulnerable adult might be at risk because of abuse or neglect. See our website for further information.

Principle Nine

Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession

Patient expectations

Patients expect:

- That all members of the dental team will maintain appropriate personal and professional behaviour.
- That they can trust and have confidence in you as a dental professional.
- That they can trust and have confidence in the dental profession.

You must:

9.1 Ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the dental profession.

9.2 Protect patients and colleagues from risks posed by your health, conduct or performance.

9.3 Inform the GDC if you are subject to criminal proceedings or a regulatory finding is made against you anywhere in the world.

9.4 Co-operate with any relevant formal or informal inquiry and give full and truthful information.

Guidance

Standard 9.1

You must ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the dental profession

9.1.1 You must treat all team members, other colleagues and members of the public fairly, with dignity and in line with the law.

9.1.2 You must not make disparaging remarks about another member of the dental team in front of patients. Any concerns you may have about a colleague should be raised through the proper channels.

9.1.3 You should not publish anything that could affect patients' and the public's confidence in you, or the dental profession, in any public media, unless this is done as part of raising a concern.

Public media includes social networking sites, blogs and other social media. In particular, you must not make personal, inaccurate or derogatory comments about patients or colleagues. See our guidance on social networking for more information.

9.1.4 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients. You must not take advantage of your position as a dental professional in your relationships with patients.

Standard 9.2

You must protect patients and colleagues from risks posed by your health, conduct or performance

9.2.1 If you know, or suspect, that patients may be at risk because of your health, behaviour or professional performance, you must consult a suitably qualified colleague immediately and follow advice on how to put the interests of patients first.

9.2.2 You must not rely on your own assessment of the risk you pose to patients. You should seek occupational health advice or other appropriate advice as soon as possible.

Standard 9.3

You must inform the GDC if you are subject to criminal proceedings or a regulatory finding is made against you, anywhere in the world

9.3.1 You must inform the GDC immediately if you are subject to any criminal proceedings anywhere in the world. See our guidance on reporting criminal proceedings for more information.

9.3.2 You must inform the GDC immediately if you are subject to the fitness to practise procedures of another healthcare regulator, either in the United Kingdom or abroad.

9.3.3 You must inform the GDC immediately if a finding has been made against your registration by another healthcare regulator, either in the United Kingdom or abroad.

9.3.4 You must inform the GDC immediately if you are placed on a barred list held by either the Disclosure and Barring Service or Disclosure Scotland.

Guidance

Standard 9.4

You must co-operate with any relevant formal or informal inquiry and give full and truthful information

9.4.1 If you receive a letter from the GDC in connection with concerns about your fitness to practise, you must respond fully within the time specified in the letter. You should also seek advice from your indemnity provider or professional association.

9.4.2 You must co-operate with:

- commissioners of health;
- other healthcare regulators;
- hospital trusts carrying out any investigation;
- the Coroner or Procurator Fiscal acting to investigate a death;
- any other regulatory body;
- the Health and Safety Executive; and
- any solicitor, barrister or advocate representing patients or colleagues.

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We want to make sure all of our services are accessible to everyone.

If you would like a copy of this leaflet in a different format (for example, in large print or audio) or in a language other than English, please contact us.

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Effective from 30 September 2013

General Dental Council

protecting patients, regulating the dental team