

## **Choosing your Dentist**

The public expect that the dental care they receive will be of the highest quality, in a safe environment, using appropriate treatments and materials and that any aftercare necessary will be readily available. Dental care is a highly personalised interaction between patient and dentist and will vary in degrees of complexity. It is therefore difficult to give absolute guidance on what constitutes “good” dentistry or a “good” dentist.

It is prudent that you visit a dentist on an ongoing basis to ensure continuity of care. Establishing a relationship with your dentist provides you with ready access to comprehensive oral healthcare advice or treatment thereby making oral conditions such as tooth decay and gum disease easier to detect and treat through early intervention. This will also significantly reduce the likelihood of the need for complex and expensive treatment later.

This guidance is designed to assist patients in making a choice. Ideally the choice of dentist should be made before any dental emergency arises to avoid having to make that decision in urgent or hurried circumstances. A dentist, in general practice, is qualified to provide all routine care and can also provide appropriate referrals in cases where more specialised treatment is indicated. Consider asking friends, family, neighbours or co-workers to recommend dentists with whom they have experience and have been pleased with their treatment.

### **Your initial consultation**

You should use your initial consultation as an opportunity to observe standards in the dental practice and to ask as many questions as necessary so that you can feel safe and confident with your choice of dentist. Satisfy yourself that the general appearance of the reception/waiting area, including the toilets, is to an acceptable standard of cleanliness and the dentist(s) and staff are neat and clean. As part of your initial consultation and in addition to questions about your dental history, you should be asked about:

- your general health and medical history;
- whether you have suffered from serious illnesses in the past;
- whether you suffer from a chronic medical condition;
- details of any medication that you have been prescribed;
- your smoking history;
- your previous surgery and general anaesthetics history.

### **Be satisfied with the standards of hygiene in the surgery**

Registered dentists are obliged to operate under comprehensive guidelines on infection control within dental surgeries. You should satisfy yourself that:

- the dentist uses an autoclave (a medical sterilizer) to sterilize instruments;
- gloves are worn by the dentist and his chair side staff at all times when you are under active treatment;
- new gloves are worn for each patient and that these are changed on their return if the treating staff leave the treatment area for any reason, such as taking a telephone call;
- handpieces (drills) are sterilized;
- new injection needles are used for each patient;
- sterilized single-use cooling solutions / water is used for surgical procedures;
- staff wash their hands between patients;
- all surgery working surfaces are clean, with disposable covers used on surfaces touched during treatment.

### **Your treatment plan and options**

When discussing your proposed treatment with your dentist you should ask:

- What are your treatment options, what other choices do you have for some or all of the treatment suggested and how much will each option cost?
- What are the rates of success and / or complications associated with each of the options offered or suggested?
- Whether the dentist has references or testimonials from previous patients who have received this or similar treatment(s) including before and after photographs of treatment previously provided by that dentist?
- What happens if treatment is unsuccessful or you are unhappy with the result?
- If there are complications and further treatment is needed, is this an additional cost and who pays?
- Who do you contact for advice after treatment?
- Is there a complaints procedure in the practice and can you see it?
- Does the dentist have professional indemnity insurance cover?
- Does the dentist provide appropriate information in writing regarding aftercare?

### **The cost of your treatment**

Before treatment is commenced you are entitled to know the cost (or best estimate) of the treatment and the way payment is to be made. You should feel free to discuss this with your dentist before treatment. Most dentists will be happy to discuss this with you, especially if you have any concerns in this regard.

**Take time to be satisfied with your decision**

Time spent making the correct decision about your choice of dentist will contribute to building a trusting patient-dentist relationship which is established on mutual respect. This will maximise your peace-of-mind, minimise any potential for conflict and help in building a long-lasting partnership to protect your oral health.

## **Going Abroad for Dental Treatment**

There can be no doubt that high quality dental care can be found outside this country also. If you are considering going abroad for dental treatment it is important that you are aware of what to expect and understand the possible risks involved. You should satisfy yourself that the benefits from possibly lower treatment costs contribute to providing a long-term solution to your dental problems. A well-informed patient is in a better position to make a well-informed decision.

You should speak with your own dentist who will be able to offer valuable advice based on your dental history. While lower fees may be a factor in deciding to seek treatment abroad it is important to be reassured that the treatment will not affect your long term dental health and well being. Before travelling you should research the treatment proposed, the clinic where the treatment will be carried out and the dentist who will be performing the treatment. You may also want to talk with other patients who have had treatment in the same clinic and/or from the same dentist. There may be on-line groups and forums that can assist with this.

This advice is intended for those considering travelling abroad for treatment and is in addition to the advice provided in the Choosing your Dentist section.

### **Registration of dentist**

- All dentists in Ireland must be registered with the Dental Council (the regulatory body) in order to practice here. The Dental Council sets the standards for the regulation of the dental profession in Ireland. There are different regulatory systems in other countries.
- It is important to establish whether the country to which you may travel has a similar regulatory body for dentists and whether it is compulsory for all dentists in that country to register with that regulatory body. You can find out about health regulators and professional bodies in other countries by visiting [www.healthregulation.org](http://www.healthregulation.org) or, for dentists, [www.fedcar.eu](http://www.fedcar.eu)
- You should ascertain if the dentist in question has professional indemnity insurance cover.

### **Language and culture**

Whatever procedure you are contemplating you should consider that patients may sometimes be disadvantaged because:

- Language and cultural differences may impede accurate interpretation of both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Your lack of familiarity with the local medical system, potentially limited access to your past medical history and possible unfamiliarity with your drugs and medicines may pose challenges if complications in treatment arise.

### **Aftercare**

- You should ensure that that you are satisfied with arrangements for follow-up care should there be complications. This facility may not be in place or may be difficult to access.
- You should be satisfied as to how financial matters will be resolved if costs escalate, such as in the case of complications, as legal recourse may be limited or difficult to obtain.

### **Flight and vacation activities after certain dental procedures**

Some dental procedures are surgical in nature. Dental implants, for example, often require months of healing prior to proceeding to any of the follow-up stages. Surgical treatment always carries risks such as post-operative bleeding, pain, swelling and infection. In addition, a period of postoperative rest may be required after procedures such as extractions, root-canal treatments, dental implants and periodontal (gum) surgery. Patients, who have had recent oral surgery, may experience postoperative discomfort which can be exacerbated by changes in airplane cabin pressure. Patients choosing to travel abroad for dental care should always seek information about the potential risks of combining certain procedures with flights and/or vacation activities.

### **Safety**

Registered dentists in Ireland are obliged to comply with a comprehensive Code of Practice relating to Infection Control in Dentistry. These guidelines exist to prevent the spread of infections, including blood borne illnesses such as Hepatitis and HIV. Registered dentists must also comply with radiography regulations (x-ray equipment and its use) and with regulations for the proper disposal of biomedical (blood and bodily tissue) waste. These standards are in place for your safety and for the safety of staff.

### **Ask questions**

Some overseas clinics may use a base in Ireland offering initial consultations before you travel abroad for treatment. Please use this opportunity to ask as many questions as possible in order that you can feel safe and confident in your decision. You should only be assessed by a qualified dentist before being given a treatment plan and cost estimate. If your pre-treatment consultation is in Ireland always ask whether the dentist is registered with the Dental Council. The dentist may be practicing illegally if not registered.

**Questions you may wish to consider asking include:**

(this list should be read in conjunction with the advice provided in the Choosing your Dentist section)

- How will I determine the qualifications and experience of the dentist who will be treating me when I am abroad?
- If a dentist claims to be a specialist it is also important to ask whether they can support this claim. European countries hold registers of dentists entitled to use the title “Specialist”.
- Will the dental team who will be treating me be able to communicate with me in a language I will understand?
- What aftercare will be provided?
- If I need any remedial work and have to return, who pays for flights, accommodation and for the additional work needed?
- Does the dentist have adequate professional indemnity cover to carry out all dental / surgical treatment including specialised procedures?
- What are my legal rights if something goes wrong with the treatment provided or if I am unhappy with the result?
- If I need remedial work for any reason including pain, bleeding or infection and do not want to travel back to where the original treatment was carried out can I have it done at home? How will this be organised for me? Who pays?
- Who can I contact for advice after treatment?
- Will my records be kept in my language or the local language?
- Will I be given all my records after treatment?