

**Code of Conduct Pertaining to  
Public Relations and  
Communications**

**THE DENTAL COUNCIL  
57 Merrion Square  
Dublin 2**

# **CODE OF PRACTICE ON PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim of these guidelines is:

- to enable the public to make judgements based on relevant, adequate and accurate information.

## **2. PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Dentists may communicate appropriate professional information to the public provided due regard is paid to professional propriety.

A dentist is permitted to:

1. Clearly indicate the location of his/her practice.
2. Provide appropriate information on the services he/she offers provided such information is:
  - Truthful.
  - Legal and decent.
  - Factual.
  - Relevant and accurate.

and provided such information:

- Does not mislead the public.
- Does not impugn the professional reputation or integrity of his/her colleagues.
- Does not bring the profession into disrepute.
- Does not exploit or take advantage of
  - (i) the physical and emotional state of patients
  - (ii) the public's lack of knowledge of dental subject matters.

### 3. THE LEGAL POSITION

Under the provisions of Section 49 of the Dentists Act 1985 a dentist may only use the description dentist, dental surgeon or dental practitioner. An exception is made in the case of dentists whose names are registered in the Register of Dental Specialists who are permitted to use a designated distinctive title.

A dentist may not in connection with the practice of dentistry take or use, or affix to or use in connection with his/her premises any title or description which is reasonably calculated to suggest that he/she possesses any professional status or qualification other than the professional status or qualification he/she in fact possesses and which is indicated by the particulars relating to him/her which are entered in the Register of Dentists. **Dentists should be aware that this provision prohibits them from making public claim to membership of associations or societies or to display qualifications that are not registered on their behalf in the Register.**

### 4. SIGNS AND PROFESSIONAL PLATES

- (i) A dentist may indicate the location of his/her place of practice by displaying at the entrance to the premises and also, if desired, at the entrance to his/her surgery within such premises, a professional plate. This plate may exhibit the dentist's name and qualifications (as recorded in the Register of Dentists) and the title dentist, dental surgeon or dental practitioner. Descriptions such as oral surgeon and orthodontist may only be used by dentists whose names are registered in the relevant division of the Register of Dental Specialists.
- (ii) Notices providing relevant information such as:
  - (a) days and hours of attendance
  - (b) the availability of an emergency service
  - (c) the practice telephone number
  - (d) the availability of treatment under State schemes
  - (e) website address
  - (f) fee structure

may also be displayed.

- (iii) The identity and registered qualifications of all dentists who practise dentistry on the premises must be displayed and be accessible to the public. When a dentist ceases to practise at that location his/her name must be removed within one month.
- (iv) All signs displayed at a practice location should be in compliance with Local Authority planning regulations.

## **5. STATIONERY**

The names of all registered dentists and auxiliary dental staff who work in a practice should be included on practice stationery.

No status, qualifications, titles or memberships may be included on practice stationery other than those that are recorded to the dentist's credit in the Register of Dentists. Statements of "a special interest" in a particular aspect of dentistry are not permitted.

## **6. PRACTICE BROCHURES**

The publication of practice brochure for the information of the public is recommended. Brochures should be available to everyone who attends the practice and to all other persons who request them.

A brochure could give a short history of the practice and provide details of the persons employed there including dentists, dental hygienists, dental nurses, dental technicians and clerical/administrative staff.

Information on services including, if necessary, a brief explanation of the treatments that are available may be provided.

Days and hours of attendance plus telephone numbers, including access details in the case of any emergency, should be included. A website address may be given.

The brochure should provide full information on private fees and should give details of the provisions of the DTSS, PRSI and other schemes operated by the practice.

Advice on what to do in the case of post treatment complications or emergencies should be included.

All information contained in a practice brochure must be factually correct and must be relevant. Care must be taken not to mislead the public and no status, qualifications, titles or memberships must be claimed other than those that are recorded to the dentist's credit in the Register of Dentists. Statements that the dentist has a "special interest" in particular aspects of dentistry are not permitted.

**7. PRICE LISTS**

Greater transparency in fees is advocated and a list of private fees should be prominently displayed in dental practices. It is accepted that a detailed estimate of the cost of treatment can only be given following a full oral examination but it should be possible to give an indication of the fees charged by the practice for routine procedures.

**8. WEBSITES**

Dentists are permitted the use of websites to give information to the public. They can contain any or all of the information available in the practice brochure. Links to other websites should be relevant and factually correct.

**11. NEWSPAPER ARTICLES, TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTS, LECTURES TO LAY AUDIENCES**

Dentists have the right and indeed a duty as citizens to initiate and become involved in public debate. However, dentists should avoid personal publicity whether in press, radio, television or other media where such publicity could result in his/her gaining professional advantage. The Council understands the difficulties in this area but dentists who engage in private practice, when being interviewed on radio or television, should make every effort to avoid linking name, profession and address. Similarly in letters or articles for the lay press the dentist should ensure that his/her name, profession and practice address are not published simultaneously.

Dentists may adopt a collective approach to the promotion of dental health in local media. The names of individual dentists, however, should not be disclosed.

A dentist giving lectures to lay audiences should ensure that such lectures do not result in his/her personal practice being promoted.

**12. AVAILABILITY**

Copies of this code must be made available in practice waiting rooms.

**Non-adherence to these guidelines may result in the dentist facing a charge of professional misconduct.**