

First draft

# Standards Framework

for Oral Health Practitioners

Dental Council  
Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho

# Ethical Principles

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The ethical principles of oral health practice

# Professional Standards

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How practitioners must conduct themselves to achieve the ethical principles

# Practice Standards

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Detailed minimum standards related to specific practice areas

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# Purpose

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- The Standards Framework sets out the minimum standards of ethical conduct, and clinical and cultural competence that patients and the public can expect from oral health practitioners.
- The standards are represented in the ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards that govern all dentists, dental specialists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, orthodontic auxiliaries, dental technicians and clinical dental technicians.
- The Standards Framework will also provide guidance for the Courts, Health and Disability Commissioner, Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal and the Dental Council when a practitioner's conduct, competence or fitness to practise is brought into question.

# Compliance

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Compliance with the Standards Framework requires practitioners to use their professional judgement and demonstrate insight at all times; and be able to justify any decision contrary to the standards.

Failure to comply with the standards could result in Dental Council involvement and may impact on the practitioner's practice.

# Terminology

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Throughout the document the following terminology applies:

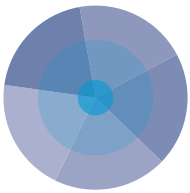
- 'must' is used where the duty is compulsory
- 'should' is a strong recommendation.

# Ethical Principles

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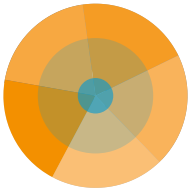
There are five ethical principles registered oral health practitioners must adhere to at all times.

You must:



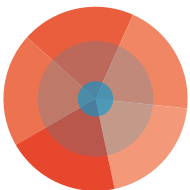
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Put patients' interests first



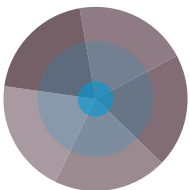
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Ensure safe practice



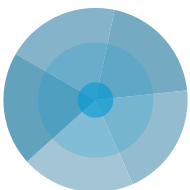
3

Communicate effectively



4

Provide good care



5

Maintain public trust and confidence

# Professional Standards

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- Professional Standards describe how practitioners **must** conduct themselves to achieve the ethical principles.
- They articulate Dental Council's expectations of practitioners' ethical conduct, and clinical and cultural competence.
- **Guidance** is provided to help practitioners meet the Professional Standards.

# Practice Standards

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Practice Standards relate to specific areas of practice that require more detailed standards on how to achieve the professional standards.<sup>1</sup>

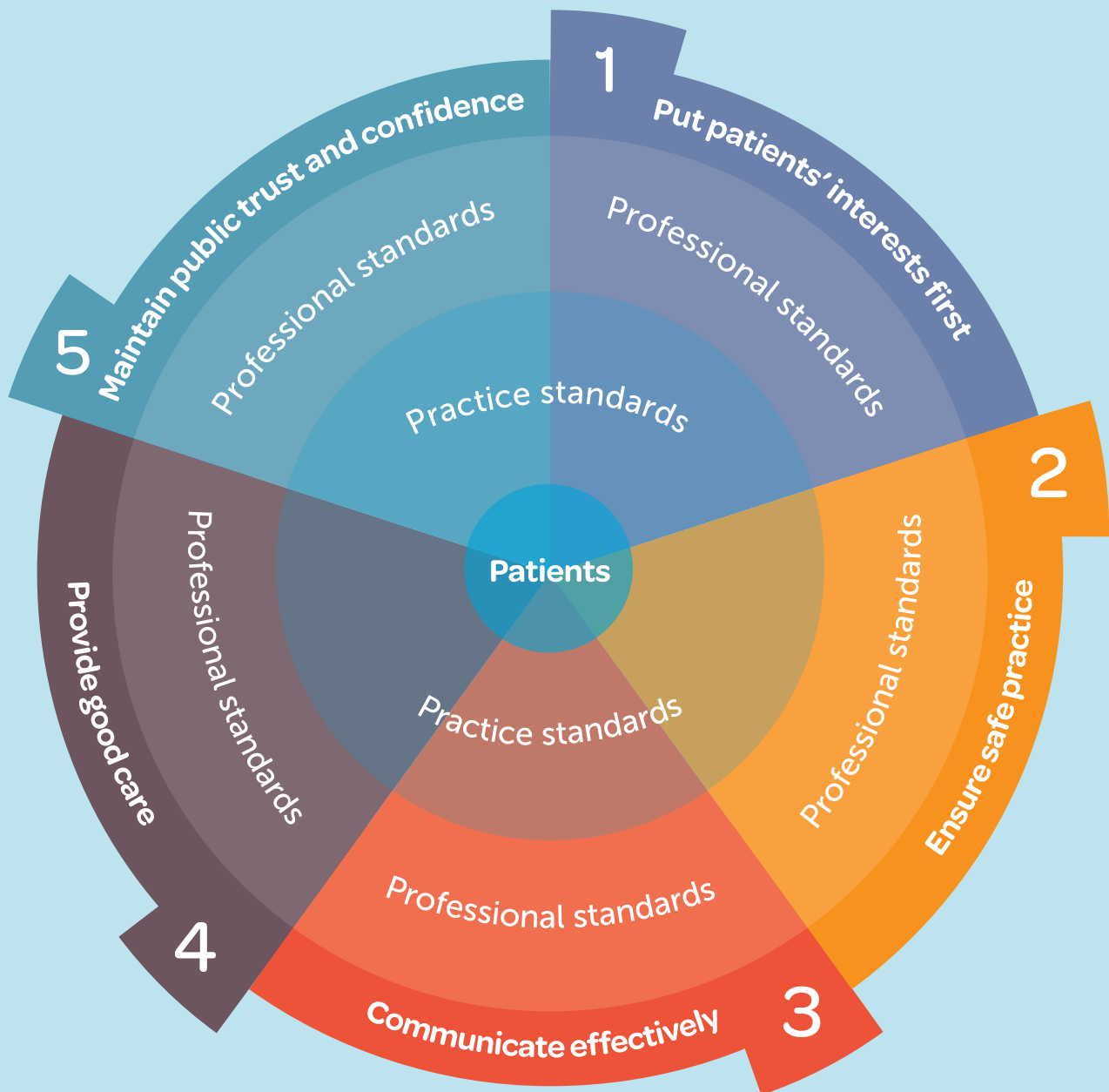
## Dental Council Practice Standards are:

- Advertising
- Sedation
- Providing care to Māori patients and their whānau
- Sexual boundaries
- Cross infection control
- Professional relationships
- Cultural competence
- Clinical competencies for scopes of practice
- Informed consent
- Cosmetic dentistry
- Patient information and records
- Cone beam computed tomography
- Medical emergencies
- Restricted activities and bleaching
- Transmissible major viral infections

<sup>1</sup> Practice Standards remain as separate documents.

# Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners

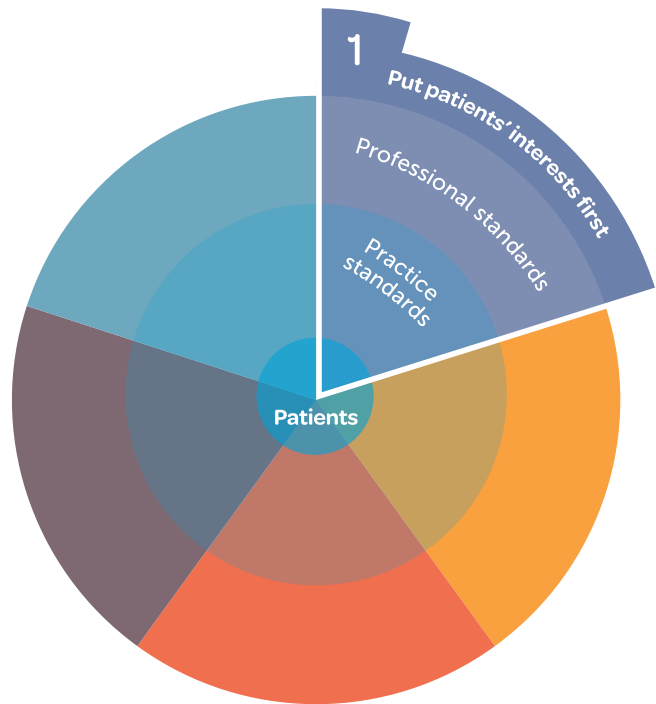
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Collectively, the ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards form the Standards Framework, that set the minimum standards of ethical conduct, clinical and cultural competence that all registered oral health practitioners must meet.

ETHICAL  
PRINCIPLE

1



# Put patients' interests first

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## Professional standards

- 1.1 You must consider the health and safety of your patients to be your first priority of care
- 1.2 You must put the interests of your patients before your own or those of colleagues, your business or organisation
- 1.3 You must treat patients with dignity and respect at all times
- 1.4 You must treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences
- 1.5 You must respect the autonomy and freedom of choice of the patient
- 1.6 You must respect patients' right to complain and seek redress
- 1.7 You must protect the confidentiality of patient information



## 1.1 You must consider the health and safety of your patients to be your first priority of care

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### Guidance

The overriding consideration when prioritising care must be patient health and safety.

**For example:**

Management of infection must take priority over other treatment needs because of the potential for life-threatening consequences.

If you believe that patients might be at risk because of your health, behaviour or professional competence or that of a colleague, or because of any aspect of the clinical environment, you must take prompt and appropriate action.

## 1.2 You must put the interests of your patients before your own or those of colleagues, your business or organisation

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### Guidance

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

**For example:**

When referring patients to another member of the dental team, the referral must be made in the patients' best interests and not for your own financial gain or benefit, or that of another team member, colleague, business or organisation.

Your treatment decisions should not hinge on an investment made in a particular piece of equipment or experience you require in a particular procedure.

## 1.3 You must treat patients with dignity and respect at all times

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### Guidance

In all your interactions with patients you must be open and honest, courteous, empathetic and supportive.

You should be sensitive to patients' preferences, needs and values.

## 1.4 You must treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences

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### Guidance

You must not discriminate against patients by, for example, refusing or compromising care on the following grounds: sex, marital status, religious or ethical belief, colour, race, ethnic or national origins, disability, age, political opinion, employment status, family status or sexual orientation; or because of your own political, religious or moral beliefs.

"Cultural values" are the beliefs common to a particular group of people, culture is not confined to ethnic origin.

You must be aware of cultural diversity when treating people of all cultural backgrounds and treat patients in a culturally sensitive manner.

You must recognise the unique place Māori hold as tangata whenua in New Zealand and honour the Treaty principles of partnership, participation and protection in the delivery and promotion of oral healthcare.

## 1.5 You must respect the autonomy and freedom of choice of the patient

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### Guidance

Patients have the right to make their own decisions about their oral health. You must fully inform your patients of their oral condition and proposed plan for care, so they can make decisions in their own best interests.

Patients' freedom of choice to decline treatment or seek a second opinion must be respected.

Patients' right to have a support person present must be respected.

## 1.6 You must respect patients' right to complain and seek redress

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### Guidance

The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights must be made readily available to patients.

You should enable patients' right to complain.

**For example:**

You should enable the complaints process by providing information willingly and in a timely manner.

## 1.7 You must protect the confidentiality of patient information

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### Guidance

All information about patients must be treated as confidential and sensitive.

Patient records must be protected by storing them securely so information is not revealed accidentally to unauthorised staff, patients or members of the public. Particular attention should be given to patient information stored and transmitted electronically.

If you want to use patient information for any reason other than the purpose for which it was obtained, you must first obtain the written consent of the patient.

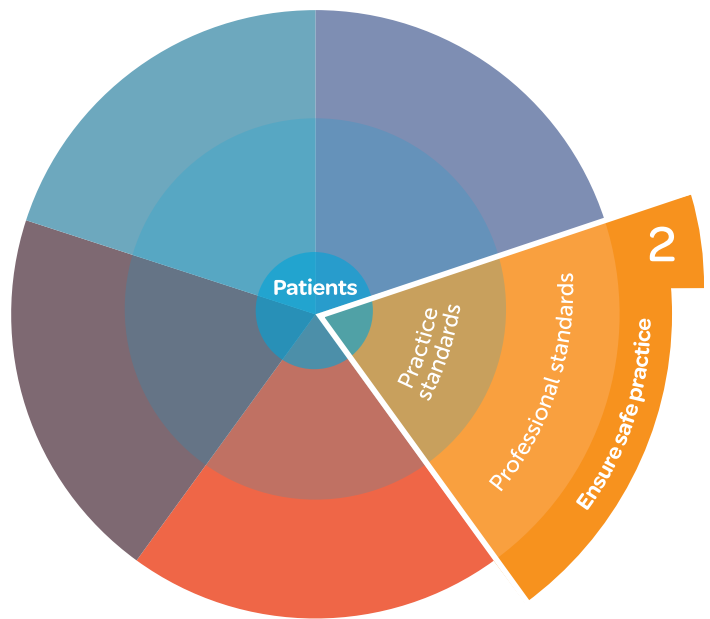
Patients must have access to the information you hold about them.

**For example:**

You must not withhold patient information from patients on the basis of an unresolved dispute.

ETHICAL  
PRINCIPLE

# 2



## Ensure safe practice

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### Professional standards

- 2.1 You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence
- 2.2 You must know when to refer to another oral health practitioners or other health professional
- 2.3 You must ensure your clinical environment does not put the safety of patients, staff, colleagues or the public at risk of harm
- 2.4 You must maintain accurate, time- bound and up-to-date patient records
- 2.5 You must maintain and enhance your professional knowledge and skills through ongoing learning and professional interaction
- 2.6 You must have arrangements in place to manage medical emergencies

## 2.1 You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence

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### Guidance

To ensure you do not cause harm to your patients you must practise safely and competently.

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

## 2.2 You must know when to refer to another oral health practitioner or other health professional

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### Guidance

You must recognise your own limitations and the special skills of others in diagnosis, prevention and treatment, and refer patients accordingly.

Recognising the level at which you are performing at a given time depends on your ability to critically reflect upon and assess your own professional knowledge, skills and competence.

## 2.3 You must ensure your clinical environment does not put the safety of patients, staff, colleagues or the public at risk of harm

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### Guidance

You must treat patients in a safe and hygienic environment.

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.

## 2.4 You must maintain accurate, time-bound and up-to-date patient records

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### Guidance

Every time you treat patients you must make and keep complete and accurate patient records.

## 2.5 You must maintain and enhance your professional knowledge and skills through ongoing learning and professional interaction

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### Guidance

Throughout your career you must be involved in learning activities to update and improve your knowledge and skills.

You must ensure you comply with Dental Council's recertification programme.

## 2.6 You must have arrangements in place to manage medical emergencies

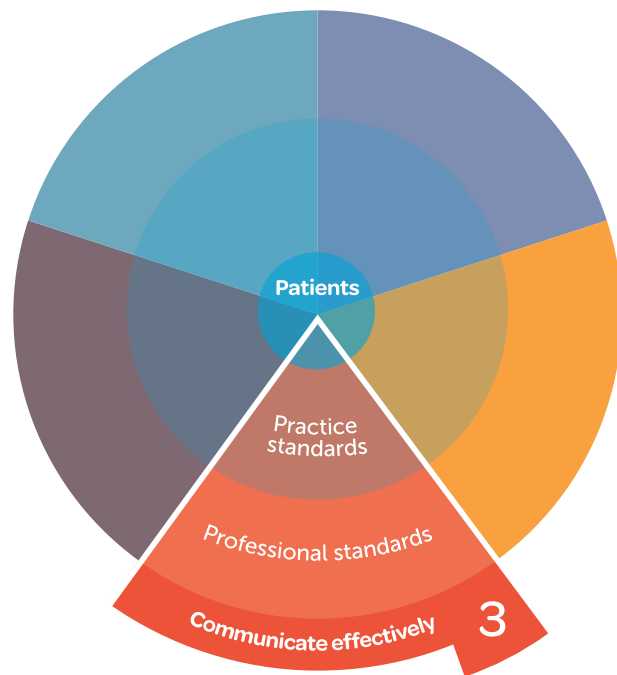
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### Guidance

It is a professional and public expectation that you can manage a medical emergency.

ETHICAL  
PRINCIPLE

# 3



## Communicate effectively

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### Professional standards

- 3.1 You must listen to your patients and take into account their preferences and concerns
- 3.2 You must communicate honestly, factually and without exaggeration
- 3.3 You must give patients the information they need or request, in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions
- 3.4 You must ensure informed consent remains valid at all times
- 3.5 You must communicate openly in inter- and intra-professional healthcare teams for the enhancement of patient care
- 3.6 You must always behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues or other health professionals



## 3.1 You must listen to your patients and take into account their preferences and concerns

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### Guidance

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.

You must give your patients the opportunity to discuss their preferences and concerns with you, and encourage patients to ask questions.

## 3.2 You must communicate honestly, factually and without exaggeration

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### Guidance

In all communications, you must provide honest, clear and accurate information.

### 3.3 You must give patients the information they need or request, in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions

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#### Guidance

You should avoid professional jargon when discussing care options with patients.

You should recognise communication challenges and try to meet an individual patient's communication needs. For example, by using an interpreter, or involving family, whanau or another support person of the patient's choosing.

You should confirm your patients' understanding of the information given to them by encouraging questions and open discussion.

You must allow patients the time they need to make an informed decision.

### 3.4 You must ensure informed consent remains valid at all times

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#### Guidance

Giving and obtaining consent is a process, not a one-off event. It must be part of on-going communication between patients and all members of the dental team involved in patient care.

### 3.5 You must communicate openly in inter- and intra-professional healthcare teams for the enhancement of patient care

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#### Guidance

You must provide detailed and accurate patient records to another health practitioner involved in the care of the patient, when there is a request for information or when you make a referral.

## 3.6 You must always behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues or other health professionals

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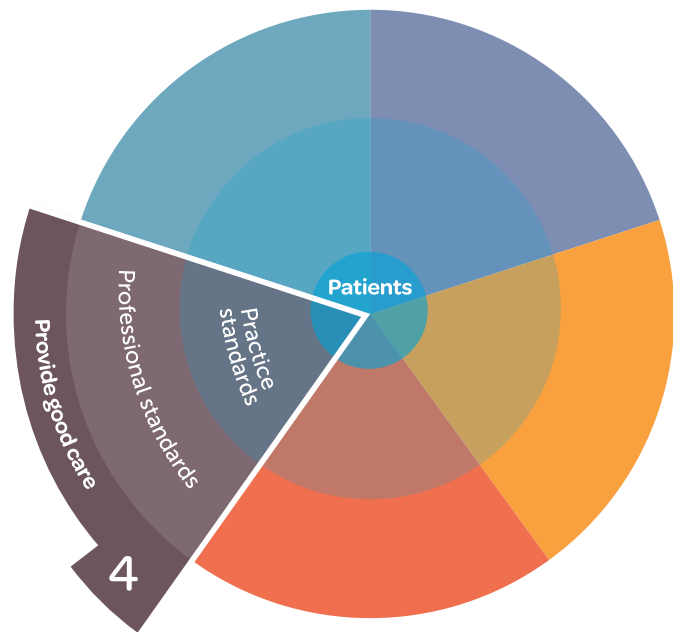
### Guidance

You must treat your colleagues courteously, respectfully and reasonably.

You should not make comments or publish anything that could affect patients' and the public's confidence in you, a colleague or the oral health professions, in any form: verbal or written, or in any public media. Public media includes social networking sites, blogs and other social media.

ETHICAL  
PRINCIPLE

# 4



## Provide good care

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### Professional standards

- 4.1 You must take a holistic approach to care which is appropriate to the individual patient
- 4.2 You must provide care that is clinically justified and based on the best available evidence
- 4.3 You must collaborate with colleagues and other health practitioners, and contribute to teamwork for enhanced patient outcomes
- 4.4 You must recognise the importance of just allocation of healthcare resources within your practice setting
- 4.5 You must protect and promote the health of patients and the public

## 4.1 You must take a holistic approach to care which is appropriate to the individual patient

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### Guidance

A holistic approach means consideration must be given to the patient's overall health, their psychological and social needs, their long term oral health needs and their desired outcomes.

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 must carefully balance the patient's oral health needs with the patient's wishes, and be able to justify your care approach for the individual patient.

If the patient's 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 the patient make a decision.

You must restrict your treatment to the activities permitted by your registered scope of practice. If patients present with issues beyond your area of practice or skills, you must refer them.

## 4.2 You must provide care that is clinically justified and based on the best available evidence

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### Guidance

Clinical justification is the progressive evaluation of treatment outcomes as part of professional accountability; it is of particular importance when treatment occurs over an extended period of time.

The outcomes of treatment must be assessed at regular intervals to determine if treatment should continue or cease, or if and when a patient should be referred to another health practitioner or specialist.

You should practice according to established professional guidelines, based on the best available evidence. If you deviate from these record the reason why and be able to justify your decision.

## 4.3 You must collaborate with colleagues and other health practitioners, and contribute to teamwork for enhanced patient outcomes

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### Guidance

You should work effectively with your colleagues and other health practitioners to provide good care to patients. You must respect the contribution of all team members involved in patients care.

## 4.4 You must recognise the importance of just allocation of healthcare resources within your practice setting

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### Guidance

You should be reasonable and fair in your allocation of healthcare resources. This will require a careful balance of effectiveness, efficiency and access within your practice setting with good patient care.

## 4.5 You must protect and promote the health of patients and the public

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### Guidance

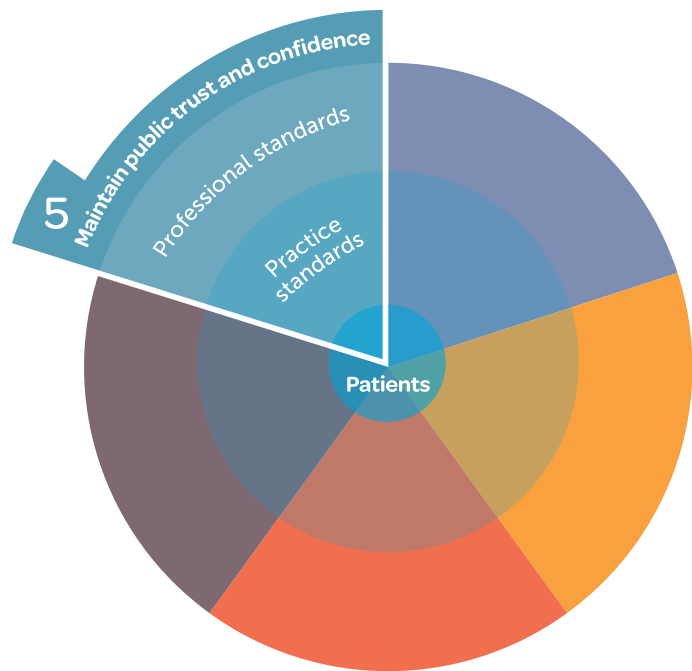
You must respond to individual patient health needs as part of patient care.

You should initiate and/or participate in broader based community intervention or setting of public policy, where necessary and practicable.

If your personal position on any aspect of oral health differs from that of the relevant profession, you are obliged to inform your patients and the public of this fact and of the extent to which your position differs from the collectively held view.

ETHICAL  
PRINCIPLE

# 5



## Maintain public trust and confidence

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### Professional standards

- 5.1 You must ensure your professional and personal conduct justifies trust in you and your profession
- 5.2 You must be familiar and comply with, your legal and professional obligations
- 5.3 You must act with honesty and integrity at all times with patients, colleagues and the public
- 5.4 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships with patients
- 5.5 You must protect patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your personal issues or health, or those of a colleague
- 5.6 You must protect patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague



## 5.1 You must ensure your professional and personal conduct justifies trust in you and your profession

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### Guidance

You must always treat all team members, colleagues, patients and members of the public fairly, with respect and in accordance with the law, in all personal and professional dealings. You are a professional at all times.

You must not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of colleagues that may undermine patients' trust in the care or treatment they receive, or the judgement of those treating them.

## 5.2 You must be familiar and comply with, your legal and professional obligations

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### Guidance

You must find out about the laws and regulations that affect your work and follow them. This includes, but is not limited to, those relating to:

- Registration with responsible authorities
- Human rights and equality
- Child protection
- Commerce, fair trading and advertising
- Employment
- Medicine control
- Health and safety
- Privacy
- Health delivery

You must inform the Dental Council immediately if any matter arises that could impact on your fitness to practise. For example, a health condition, any criminal proceedings, a court conviction, or an investigation.

You must co-operate fully with any investigatory or legal processes, and be honest and accurate in your responses.

## 5.3 You must act with honesty and integrity at all times with patients, colleagues and the public

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### Guidance

You must respect the right of your colleagues and patients to hold different views, and you must not make personal, inaccurate or derogatory comments about your colleagues or patients.

You must be honest and open in any financial dealings with patients, employers, insurers or other organisations and individuals.

#### For example:

Do not exploit patients' lack of dental knowledge when charging for treatment or services.

If you are offered a commercial gift, payment or hospitality, and you choose to accept such a favour, you must ensure that your acceptance does not cloud your professional judgment and compromise your delivery of good patient care.

## 5.4 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships with patients

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### Guidance

You must not take advantage of your position as an oral health professional in your relationships with patients.

## 5.5 You must protect patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your personal issues or health, or those of a colleague

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### Guidance

If you know, or suspect, that patients or colleagues may be at risk because of your personal issues or health, you should seek appropriate medical advice as soon as possible and, you must inform the Dental Council and follow its advice. Do not rely on your own assessment of the risk you pose to patients.

If you have good reason to believe a colleague is suffering from a mental or physical condition which could affect their ability to deliver patient care or place colleagues at risk, you must tell the Dental Council. A physical condition includes substance abuse or addictions.

## 5.6 You must protect patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague

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### Guidance

If you know, or suspect, that patients or colleagues may be at risk because of your competence or conduct, you must inform the Dental Council and follow its advice.

If you have good reason to believe the competence or conduct of a colleague is placing patients at risk, you should inform the Dental Council immediately.

If you are an employer of a practitioner who resigns or is dismissed from their employment for reasons relating to competence, you must notify the Dental Council.

