

PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL ADVERTISING

EFFECTIVE FROM 1 MARCH 2012

Guidance on ethical advertising

All information or publicity material regarding dental services should be legal, decent, honest and truthful.

Advertising by dental professionals can be a source of information to help patients make informed choices about their dental care. But advertising that is false, misleading or has the potential to mislead patients is unprofessional, may lead to referral to fitness to practise proceedings and can be a criminal offence.

Patients may be confused and uncertain about dental treatment so you should take special care when explaining your services to them. This includes providing balanced, factual information enabling them to make an informed choice about their treatment. Do not exploit the trust, vulnerability or relative lack of knowledge of your patients.

Misleading claims can make it more difficult for patients to choose a dental professional or dental services and this can lead to expectations which cannot be fulfilled and, in more serious cases, can put patients at risk of harm from an inappropriate choice.

Patients can check with us that their dental professional is registered and whether they are on a specialist list, but they are more likely to rely on information that you provide such as practice leaflets or certificates on the practice wall.

The onus is on you to be honest in your presentation of your skills and qualifications. If you make misleading claims, you may have to justify your decisions to the GDC through our fitness to practise procedures.

Advertising services

Whenever you, your practice, or any place where you work as a registrant, produce any information containing your name, you are responsible for checking that it is correct. You must:

- i) ensure information is current and accurate;
- ii) make sure that your GDC registration number is included;
- iii) use clear language that patients are likely to understand;
- iv) back up claims with facts;
- v) avoid ambiguous statements; and
- vi) avoid statements or claims intended or likely to create an unjustified expectation about the results you can achieve.

Advertisements and other practice publicity must make clear whether the practice is NHS, mixed or wholly private.

Only recommend products if they are the best way to meet a patient's needs.

If you wish to offer services which your training as a dental professional does not qualify you to provide, make sure you undertake appropriate additional training to attain the necessary competence. Do not mislead patients into believing that you are trained and competent to provide other services purely by virtue of your primary qualification as a healthcare professional, but make clear that you have undertaken extra training to achieve competence.

PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL ADVERTISING

Websites

In line with European guidance¹, for all dental professionals providing dental care mentioned on the site the following information must be displayed:

- i) their professional qualification and the country from which that qualification is derived; and
- ii) their GDC registration number.

Dental practice websites must display the following information:

- i) the name and geographic address at which the dental service is established;
- ii) contact details of the dental service, including e-mail address and telephone number;
- iii) the GDC's address and other contact details, or a link to the GDC website;
- iv) details of the practice's complaints procedure and information of who patients may contact if they are not satisfied with the response (namely the relevant NHS body for NHS treatment and the Dental Complaints Service for private treatment) and
- v) the date the website was last updated.

Update the information showing on your website regularly so that it accurately reflects the personnel at the practice and the service offered.

A dental practice website must not display information comparing the skills or qualifications of any dental professional providing any service with the skills and qualifications of other dental professionals.

Specialist titles

Only dentists who are on a GDC specialist list may use the title 'Specialist' or describe themselves as a 'specialist in...'

Dentists who are not on a GDC specialist list should not use titles which may imply specialist status such as Orthodontist, Periodontist, Endodontist etc.

There are no specialist lists for dental care professionals. Dental care professionals should ensure that they do not mislead patients by using titles which could imply specialist status, such as 'Smile specialist' or 'Denture specialist'.

Registrants who are not on a specialist list should not describe themselves as 'specialising in...' a particular form of treatment but may use the terms 'special interest in..', 'experienced in..' or 'practice limited to..'

Honorary degrees and memberships

Patients may reasonably believe that if you put a qualification after your name, it has been 'earned', that is, it represents a particular level of academic achievement. This may not be the case where a degree is honorary. Listing memberships or fellowships of professional associations or societies can also mislead. The letters may imply to the public that a registrant has attained a certain level of skill which in fact may not be the case.

1 The Council of European Dentists' (CED) EU Manual of Dental Practice contains extensive information on oral health systems as well as legal and ethical regulations across the EU. In particular this includes the Code of Ethics for Dentists in the EU for Electronic Commerce which covers the content of websites