**DEMYSTIFING THE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST INDENTAL PRACTICE**

**Abstract:**

The practice of dentistry as evolved over the years with the advancement of technology and science. The paramount goal of the profession is to provide optimal oral health services to the patients by upholding the primary interest of the patient in decision making for provision of treatment. In the decision making process the dentist may encounter conflict of interest. However, it is required for the dentist to manage or disclose the conflict of interest for the best interest of the patients. Conflicts of interest arise when dental professionals give priority to their own professional or personal interests over the interests of their patients and others who rely upon their integrity, whether their interests are financial or otherwise. Dentistry as a business runs by charging the patients for the skill and proficiency, which the dentist as acquired in the due course. The practise of dentistry must also emphasise on core value of ethics and professionalism and it should be given prime importance in patient care. Their still exists slim pickings in the arena of conflicts of interest in terms to dental practice therefore this article gives a overview about certain issues which arises the conflict of interest and demystifying the same in dental practice.

Every dentist is called upon to participate in service—the chief motive being to benefit mankind, with the dentist’s financial rewards secondary. While dentistry is first a profession, the practice of dentistry usually involves financial compensation for professional services. Since dentists are in a position to gain financially from their professional recommendations, they are at risk of having a conflict of interest, whether actual or perceived.1

Conflict of interest is defined as ‘‘A set of conditions in which professional judgment concerning a patient’s welfare or validity of research can be influenced by financial gain: paid speaking engagements, gifts, travel, owning of company shares etc. conflict of interest is a set of conditions in which a professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as a patient’s welfare or the validity of research) tends to be influenced by a secondary interest (such as personal obligations or personal/financial interests) that would make it dif­ficult for professionals to fulfill their duties fairly .2 Primary interest of medical professionals refers to the principal goals of the medical profession, such as the health and safety of patients, and the integrity of research. Secondary interest includes not only financial gain but also such motives as the desire for professional advancement and the wish to do favors for family and friends, but COI rules usually focus on financial relationships because they are relatively more objective, fungible, and quantifiable .3

Some conflicts are worse than others, but money is recognized as corroding professional responsibility most often and most aggressively.4 However, not all COIs involve money: some may be personal, such as fame seeking, job promotion, or religious beliefs. But, financial COIs are the most common, and policies covering such conflicts involve physicians in all areas of medical practice, academia and research, and professional societies.

From an ethical viewpoint, whether any particular conflict, financial or otherwise, poses a serious problem, and how it should be resolved, depends on several factors. The major elements that should be considered in assessing the likelihood of undue influence and the seriousness of possible harm include the nature of the secondary interest and how important it is, the likelihood of harm and how serious it would be to the primary interest, and what measures are available to mitigate the COI.5

COI can be individual or institutional. Types of individual COI include financial, professional, and intellectual COIs.Institutional COI arise from relationships established by the individual’s institution, and of which that individual is aware. Types of institutional COI include financial and advocatory COIs. Distinguishing characteristics between The Different Types of COI, Financial COI implies direct benefit, while professional COI implies indirect benefit; Professional COI implies a clinical activity, while intellectual COI implies a non-clinical activity; intellectual COI implies no public statement, while advocatory COI implies a public statement6.

**When does a conflict of interest arise?**

1.Selling dental products for a profit to patients in the office as the patients are getting a good deal on the product.

2.Dentist to giving patients a bonus/credit for referring a patient.

3.Dentist to call a specialist Eg oral surgeon come in and remove wisdom teeth for that dentist’s patients in exchange for 50% of the gross fees (as a facility fee) even though the patient is unaware of the financial relationship between the dentist and the specialist .

4.Receiving gifts on festivals or on birthdays from specialists to whom dentists refer patients

5.Referring patients to laboratories ,diagnostics centres for financial interest

6.Dental Surgeon shall not receive any gift from any pharmaceutical or allied health care industry and their sales people or representatives. A Dental Surgeon shall not accept any travel facility inside the country or outside, including rail, air, ship, cruise tickets, paid vacations etc

7.Paying another health practitioner who is also the dentist’s property owner more than the normal rent for office space in exchange for sending referrals.

8.Regulatory bodies have a troubling conflict of interest when they administer the professional malpractice insurance, advising dentists accordingly regarding claims, and protecting the rights of patients at the same time.

9.Dentist not informing patients of treatments that are done solely to complete credit requirements (e.g., complex vs. simple extraction) since clinic patients have signed a blanket consent form.7

**Tenets of dental professionalism to mitigate Conflict of interest In Dental Practice**

1.The dentist must adhere to the principals of professionalism giving proper priority to the well-being of the patient over other considerations. Disclosure is an essential first step in the process of managing COIs. Making patients aware of their physicians' financial relationships not only provides them with information that might be relevant to their care, but grants them an opportunity to make a truly informed decision about that care.

2. Dentist should disclose all relevant conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, to patients under their care.

3. Dentist irrespective of where they work, should not accept anything of material value from pharmaceutical, biological, or device manufacturers, except when legitimate work is performed for which fair market payment is made.

4.Dentist should not act as consultants for industry unless they perform legitimate professional services based on a written contract with payment set at fair market rates.

5.Dentist should not give educational presentations or publish scientific papers in which the content is created, controlled, or written by industry, or by an unacknowledged author.

6. Dentist should not accept or use drug samples, except in specific hardship cases when patients are without resources to purchase needed medications.

7.Dentist should not accept gifts, even those of nominal value, from industry sources or of commercial interest.

8.Dentist should follow ethical precepts, particularly the primacy of patients' welfare, when choosing both medically necessary and cosmetic treatments.

9. Dentist in medical practice should avoid selling health care products for profit in their offices.8

If the patient s relevant interests are always considered, the profession of dentistry can ethically exist within a business structure. Professional decision-making may involve many factors. However, the level of financial gain to the dentist must never be a consideration in any of the dentist’s professional recommendations.9.

Conclusion

Dentistry is a profession with a unique combination of business and professionalism. It is a business in terms set up required and profession in terms of the benefit given to the patients and society by utilizing ones skills and training10. Dentist must be free of COIs and dentistry as a profession, must be accountable to its own core ethical values. The patient is the beneficiary of the dentist’s services. The dentist is required to make appropriate decisions for the best interest of the patient by adequately balancing the risks and benefit and attaining optimal oral health.

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