

# 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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What practitioners must do to ensure they adhere to the Ethical Principles

# Practice Standards

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Detailed standards related to specific practice areas

## **Acknowledgement**

Local and international documents have informed and contributed to the development of the Standards Framework. Dental Council acknowledges the work of the General Dental Council (United Kingdom); New Zealand Dental Association, Medical Council of New Zealand; Nursing Council of New Zealand; Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand; Dental Board of Australia; and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

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# Purpose

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The Dental Council is required by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 to set standards of clinical competence, cultural competence and ethical conduct for oral health practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

## Patients have the right to:

- have services provided with reasonable care and skill;
- have services provided that comply with legal, professional, ethical, and other relevant standards;
- have services provided in a manner consistent with his or her needs;
- have services provided in a manner that minimises the potential harm to, and optimises the quality of life of, that consumer;
- co-operation among providers to ensure quality and continuity of services.<sup>2</sup>

The Standards Framework describes the minimum standards of ethical conduct, and clinical and cultural competence that patients and the public can expect from oral health practitioners.

These standards are defined in the ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards that govern all dentists, dental specialists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, oral health therapists, orthodontic auxiliaries, dental technicians and clinical dental technicians.

**The Standards Framework also provides 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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All registered oral health practitioners are required to meet the Council's Professional Standards and Practice Standards, and adhere to the Ethical Principles.

Failure to meet the standards and adhere to the Ethical Principles could result in Dental Council involvement and may impact on the practitioner's practice.

Sometimes factors outside of a practitioner's control may affect whether or not, or how, they can meet the standards. In such circumstances, practitioners are expected to adhere to the ethical principles, demonstrate insight and use their professional judgement to determine appropriate behaviour.

Practitioners must be able to justify their behaviour when this is contrary to the standards, and document their reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 118(i) of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

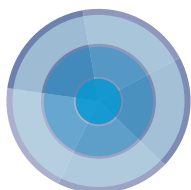
<sup>2</sup> Right 4 of the Code of Health and Disability Service Consumers' Rights.

# Ethical Principles

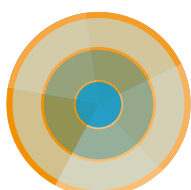
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There are five ethical principles registered oral health practitioners must adhere to at all times. The principles are not listed in any order of priority; they all have equal importance.

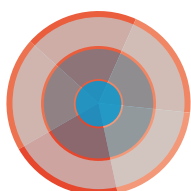
## You must:



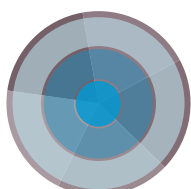
Put patients' interests first



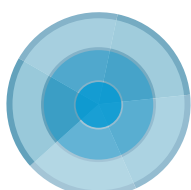
Ensure safe practice



Communicate effectively



Provide good care



Maintain public trust and confidence

# Professional Standards

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What practitioners must do to ensure they achieve the Ethical Principles.

- A Professional Standard may relate to a number of Ethical Principles, and is aligned to the Ethical Principle it most strongly relates to.
- [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 to enable practitioners to meet the Professional Standards and Ethical Principles.<sup>3</sup>

The Practice Standards are relevant to various Professional Standards and Ethical Principles.

### Dental Council Practice Standards are:

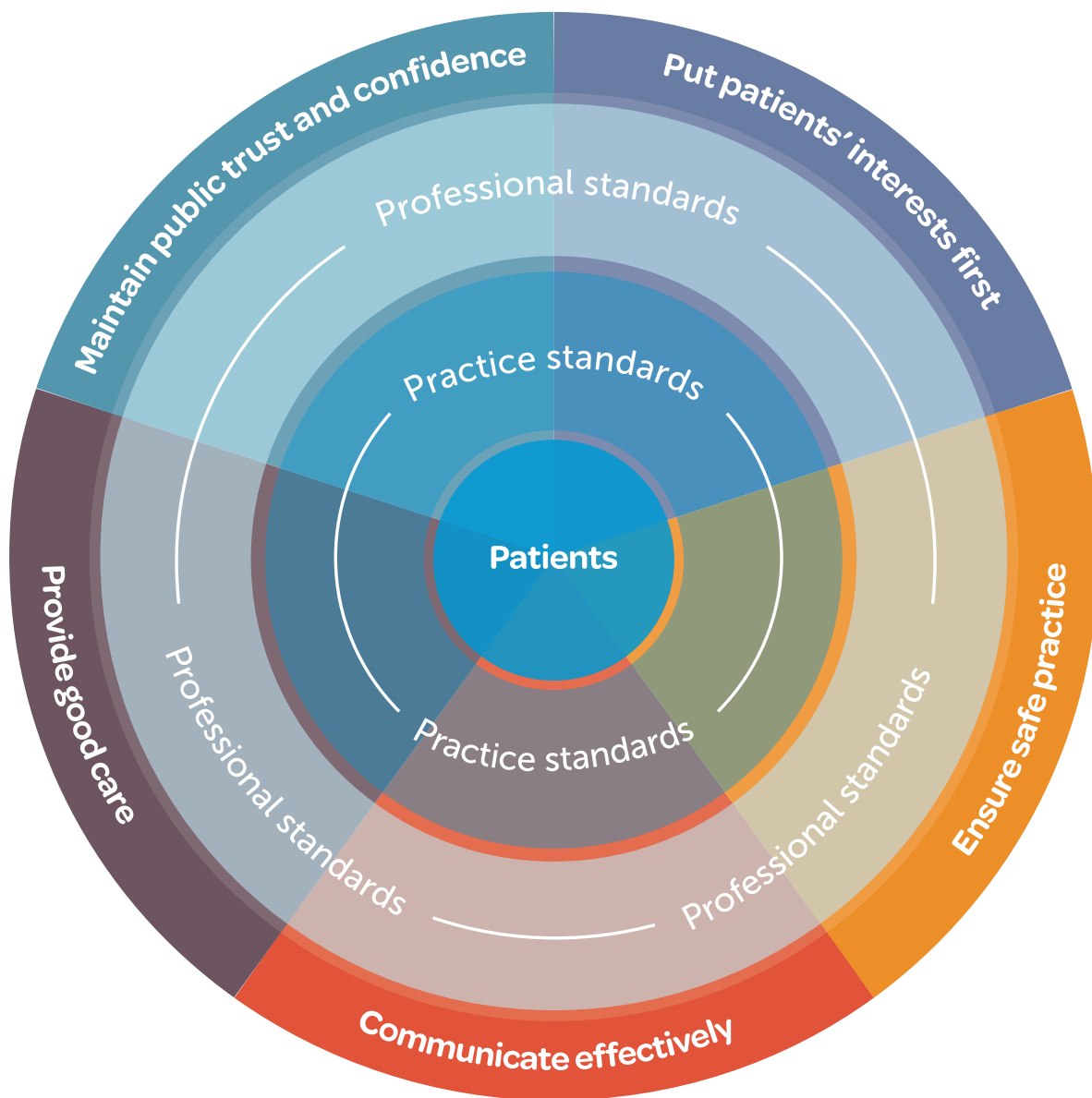
- Advertising
- Providing care to Māori patients and their whānau
- Clinical competencies for scopes of practice
- Infection prevention and control
- Cultural competence
- Informed consent
- Medical emergencies
- Patient records and privacy of health information
- Professional boundaries
- Sedation
- Professional boundaries
- Transmissible major viral infections
- Guidance for the consultative professional relationship between an Oral health therapist and dentists/dental specialists
- Dental hygiene working relationship
- Dental therapy working relationship
- Dental technology working relationship
- Orthodontic auxiliary working relationship

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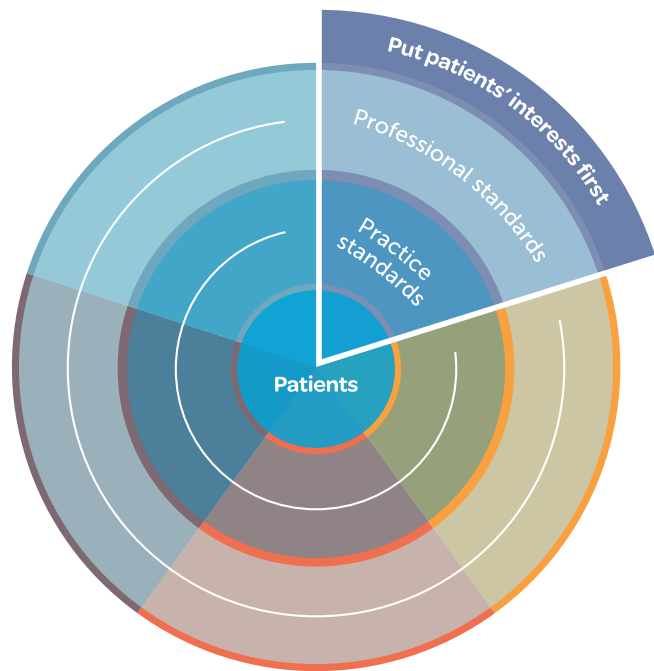
<sup>3</sup> Practice Standards (formerly known as codes of practice or statements) remain as separate documents.

# Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners

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



ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

## Put patients' interests first

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### Professional standards

- 1 You must ensure the health needs and safe care of your patients are your primary concerns
- 2 You must put the interests of your patients ahead of personal, financial or other gain
- 3 You must treat patients with dignity and respect at all times
- 4 You must treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences
- 5 You must respect the autonomy and freedom of choice of the patient
- 6 You must respect patients' right to complain and enable them to seek redress
- 7 You must protect the confidentiality of patient information



# 1 You must ensure the health needs and safe care of your patients are your primary concerns

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## Guidance

Consider the complete health needs of your patient, and recognise that in some circumstances overall health needs may take precedence over oral health needs.

Care for your patients in a consistently safe and competent manner.

Recognise the value of an intra- and inter-professional approach to care when considering the complete health needs of your patients.

# 2 You must put the interests of your patients ahead of personal, financial or other gain

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There is no guidance for this standard.

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

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## Guidance

Be open and honest, courteous, empathetic and supportive in all your interactions with patients.

Be sensitive to patients' preferences, needs and values.

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

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### Guidance

Do not discriminate against patients by reason of 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.

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

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

## 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. Ensure your patients are fully informed of their oral condition and proposed plan for care, so they can make decisions in their best interests.

Respect patients’ freedom of choice to decline treatment or seek a second opinion.

Respect patients’ right to have a support person present.

## 6 You must respect patients' right to complain and enable them to seek redress

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### Guidance

Facilitate the fair, simple, speedy and efficient resolution of complaints.

Inform the patient of any relevant internal or external complaints procedures.

Ensure patients are aware of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights.

## 7 You must protect the confidentiality of patient information

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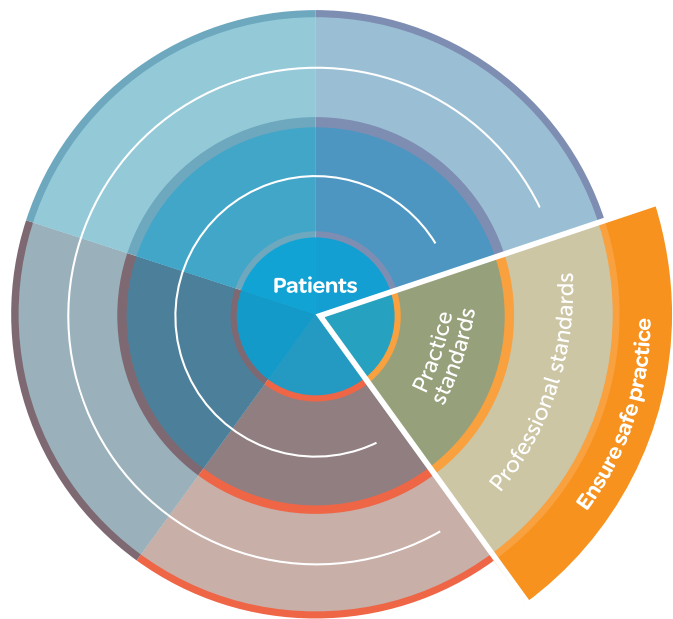
### Guidance

Treat all patient information as confidential.

Protect patient records so information is not revealed to unauthorised staff, patients or members of the public.

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

Allow patients access to the information you hold about them. Do not withhold information on the basis of an unresolved dispute.



ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

## Ensure safe practice

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### Professional standards

- 8 You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence, or refer to another health practitioner
- 9 You must identify and manage health and safety risks within your practice environment
- 10 You must maintain accurate, time-bound and up-to-date patient records
- 11 You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up-to-date through ongoing learning and professional interaction
- 12 You must have arrangements in place to manage medical emergencies

## 8 You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence, or refer to another health practitioner

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### Guidance

Practise safely and competently to ensure you do not cause harm to your patients.

Only carry out a task or a type of treatment if you have the knowledge and skills to do so competently within your scope of practice.

Recognise your own limitations and the special skills of others in diagnosis, prevention and treatment, and refer patients accordingly. Such referral might be to an oral health practitioner or other health professional.

## 9 You must identify and manage health and safety risks within your practice environment

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### Guidance

Maintain a safe work environment for patients, staff and colleagues and the protection of the public.

Identify and appropriately manage potential hazards, and behavioural risks in your place of work.

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

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There is no guidance for this standard.

## 11 You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up-to-date through ongoing learning and professional interaction

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### Guidance

Be involved in learning activities to update your knowledge and skills throughout your career.

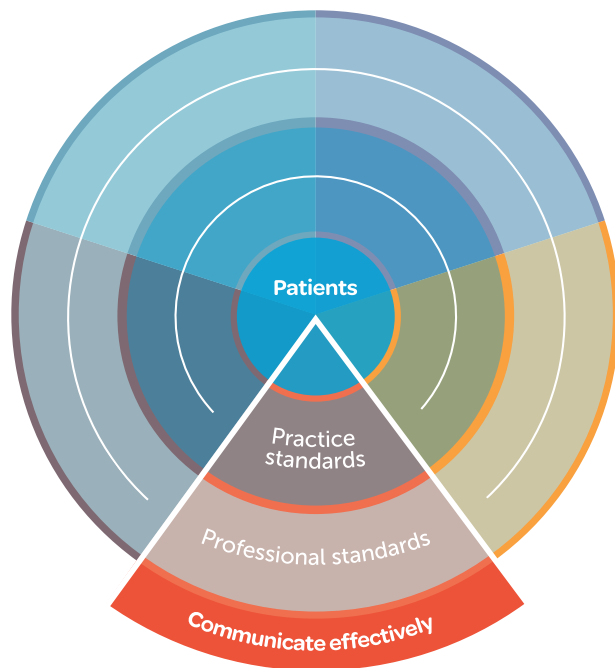
Ensure you comply with Dental Council's recertification programmes.

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

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There is no guidance for this standard.





ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

# Communicate effectively

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## Professional standards

- 13 You must communicate honestly, factually and without exaggeration
- 14 You must listen to your patients and consider their preferences and concerns
- 15 You must give patients the information they need or request, in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions
- 16 You must ensure informed consent remains valid at all times
- 17 You must communicate openly in inter- and intra- professional healthcare teams for the enhancement of patient care
- 18 You must behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues or other health professionals



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

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There is no guidance for this standard.

## 14 You must listen to your patients and consider their preferences and concerns

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### Guidance

Treat patients as individuals. Take their specific communication needs and preferences into account and respect any cultural values and differences.

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

## 15 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

Provide clear information to patients.

Recognise communication barriers and meet patients' individual communication needs.

Confirm your patients' understanding of the information given to them.

Allow patients the time they need to make an informed decision.

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

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### Guidance

Giving and obtaining informed consent is an ongoing process of communication between patients and all members of the dental team involved in patient care.

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

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### Guidance

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

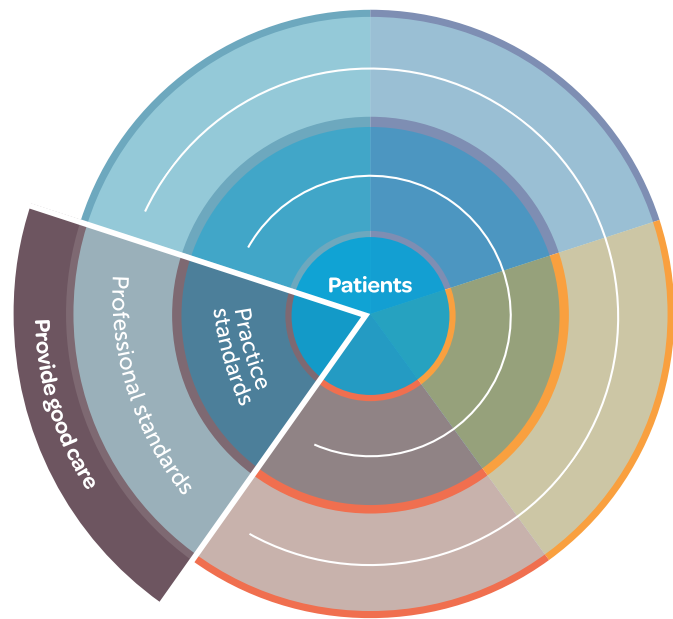
## 18 You must behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues or other health professionals

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### Guidance

Treat your colleagues courteously, respectfully and reasonably in all forms of communication – verbal or written, or in any public media – including social media.





ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

## Provide good care

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### Professional standards

- 19 You must take a holistic approach to care appropriate to the individual patient
- 20 You must provide care that is clinically justified and based on the best available evidence
- 21 You must collaborate with colleagues and other health practitioners, and contribute to teamwork for enhanced patient outcomes
- 22 You must protect and promote the health of patients and the public

## 19 You must take a holistic approach to care appropriate to the individual patient

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### Guidance

A holistic approach is all-inclusive; it requires you to give consideration to the patient's overall health, their psychological and social situation, their oral health needs (immediate and long term) and their desired outcomes.

Provide patients with oral health advice and treatment options relevant to their situation, and discuss associated benefits, likely outcomes and potential risks.

Carefully balance the patient's oral health needs with the patient's wishes and be able to explain your approach to care, which could include declining to treat.

Restrict your treatment to the activities permitted by your registered scope of practice. Refer patients who present with issues beyond your area of practice or competence.

## 20 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.

Assess the outcomes of treatment 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.

To inform your care use the best available evidence resulting from scientific research, or if absent, strong theoretical rationale, suggestive evidence, or the opinions of respected authorities.

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

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### Guidance

Work effectively with your colleagues and other health practitioners to provide good care to patients.

Respect the contribution of all team members involved in patients' care.

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

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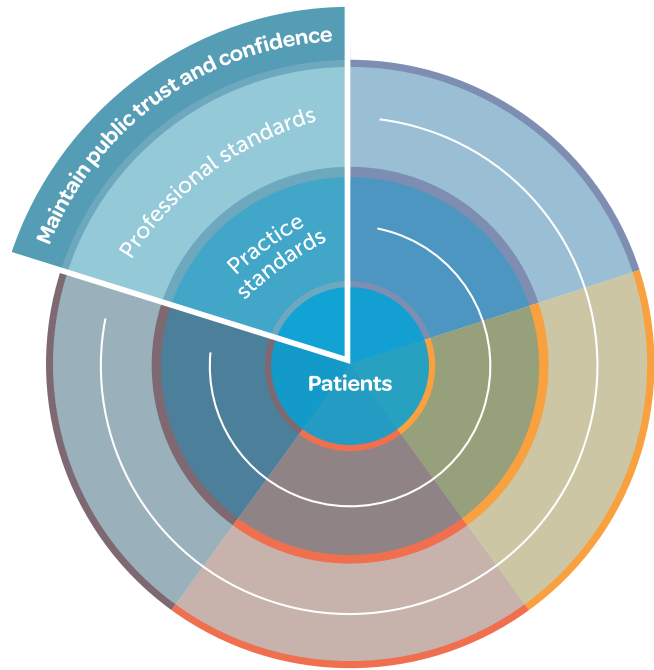
### Guidance

Enable patients to maintain and enhance their individual well-being by increasing their awareness and understanding of health matters.

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, 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

# Maintain public trust and confidence

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## Professional standards

- 23 You must ensure your professional and personal conduct justifies trust in you and your profession
- 24 You must be familiar, and comply, with your legal and professional obligations
- 25 You must act with honesty and integrity at all times with patients, colleagues and the public
- 26 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in your interactions with patients, colleagues and the public
- 27 You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your personal issues or health, or those of a colleague
- 28 You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague or an employee



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

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### Guidance

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.

Do not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of colleagues that may undermine patients' trust in the care or treatment they receive; or the profession.

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

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### Guidance

Find out about the laws and regulations that affect your work and follow them.

Understand that laws and regulations may change and it is your responsibility to keep up to date with those affecting your work.

Inform the Dental Council immediately if any matter arises that could impact on your fitness to practise, such as a health condition, any criminal proceedings, a court conviction, or an investigation.

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

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

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### Guidance

Respect the right of your colleagues and patients to hold different views, and do not make personal, inaccurate or derogatory comments about your colleagues or patients.

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

## 26 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in your interactions with patients, colleagues and the public

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### Guidance

Do not take advantage of your position as an oral health professional in your interactions with patients and the public.

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

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### Guidance

Seek appropriate medical advice as soon as possible.

If you suspect or know that patients or colleagues may be at risk because of your mental or physical health, you are required to inform the Dental Council, and follow its advice.

If you have good reason to believe a colleague is suffering from a health condition which could affect their ability to deliver patient care or place colleagues at risk, you are required to inform the Dental Council.<sup>4</sup>

A health condition includes substance abuse or addictions.

## 28 You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague or an employee

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### Guidance

If you are an employer of a practitioner who resigns or is dismissed from their employment for reasons relating to competence, you are required to notify the Dental Council.<sup>5</sup>

If you know, or suspect, that patients or colleagues may be at risk because of your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague, you have a professional obligation to inform the Dental Council.

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<sup>4</sup> Section 45 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Section 34 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

