Community

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Ethics in Dentistry

Definition

Ethics can be defined as a branch of philosophy that deals with thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments.

Principles of ethics

The principles of ethics are the following:
1. Patient autonomy (self-governance)
2. Non maleficence (do no harm)
3. Beneficence (do good)
4. Justice (fairness)
5. Veracity (truthfulness)
6. Fidelity
7. Confidentiality.

1. Patient autonomy (Self-governance)

Patient autonomy is based on the principle of respect for persons. Independent actions and choices of an individual should not be constrained by others and they should be respected. The duty of the dentist is to respect the patient's rights to self-determination and confidentiality. Professionals have to treat the patient according to the patient's needs, within the limits of accepted treatment, and to protect the patient's confidentiality. The dentist's

primary obligations include involving patients in treatment decisions in a meaningful way, with due consideration being given to the patient's needs, desires and abilities, and safeguarding the patient's privacy.

2. Non maleficence (Do No Harm)

The dentist has to refrain from harming the patient. Professionals have to protect the patient from harm. The primary obligations include keeping knowledge and skills, knowing one's own limitations and when to refer to a specialist or other professional, and knowing when and under what circumstances delegation of patient care to auxiliaries is appropriate.

3. Beneficence (Do Good)

The dentist has to promote the patient's welfare. This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to act for the benefit of others and the dentist's primary obligation is the service to the patient and the public-at-large. The most important aspect of this obligation is the competent and timely delivery of dental care within the bounds of clinical circumstances presented by the patient, with due consideration being given to the needs, desires and values of the patient.

4. Justice (Fairness)

The dentist has to treat people fairly. Principle of truthfulness comprises dentist's sincerity toward patients, truth telling, never deceiving. This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to be fair in their

dealings with patients, colleagues and society and the primary obligations to a dentist include dealing with people justly and delivering dental care without prejudice. Accepting the principle of justice in contemporary ethics is reflected in right to be treated. This right consists of three issues:

1. To be honest with patients
2. To give patients what they deserve
3. To give patients what they have right on.

5. Veracity (Truthfulness)

The dentist has to communicate truthfully. This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to be honest and trustworthy in their dealings with people and the dentist's primary obligations include respecting the position of trust inherent in the dentist-patient relationship, communicating truthfully and without deception, and maintaining intellectual integrity.

6. Fidelity

It is the obligation to keep implied or explicit promises.

7. Confidentiality

Dental professionals have a legal and ethical duty. It is to keep patient information confidential. Principle of confidentiality means that a dentist must be discrete. Confidentiality comprises preservation of all information concerning patient, his/her diseases and treatment.

The significance of it is in feeling of confidence a patient has, in belief that his/her doctor is "silent" despite everything heard or seen.

It is the responsibility of dental professionals to treat any information about patients as confidential and only use it in the context in which it was given. Confidential information should be kept in a secure place at all times to prevent unauthorized or accidental disclosure.

Dentist-Patient Relationship

A Dentist

• Must safeguard the health of patients irrespective of their individual status.

• Must not prescribe or provide treatment which is not necessary.

• Has the freedom of choice whether to accept or decline to treat a patient, except for the provision of emergency care, for humanitarian reasons.

• Must obtain appropriate agreement or consent from the patient for the treatment which is to be carried out. For this , information must be provided about the proposed treatment, other treatment options and relevant material risks. The patient must have the opportunity to ask questions. The patient should also be informed of the cost of the proposed treatment, as soon as this is known.

• Must ensure professional confidentiality and the security of personal health information. Accurate, detailed and relevant medicodental records must be kept and the dental staff must be aware of the need for confidentiality. Data must be obtained and processed fairly, for specified,

explicit and legitimate purposes and according to data protection principles.

• Must keep all data relating to patients confidential and secure. Where data is stored electronically special security precautions must be taken to prevent access from outside the premises during electronic transfer procedures or remote maintenance of the system.

• May not transmit data on patients to third parties except when it is justified by the written consent of the patient or where it is required under statutory provision. All data passed on to third parties should be recorded as such.

• Must accept responsibility for the treatment he undertakes, within the framework of an undertaking to make best efforts.

• Must refer for advice and/or treatment any patient requiring a level of competence beyond his or her own. He is obliged to refer a patient to a professional colleague for a second opinion, if that is requested by the patient himself.

• Must provide to a patient, or his properly appointed representative, information which is correct and does not mislead.

• Must respond to patient complaints and try to resolve the issue.